

**Labouring In and Away from the Village**  
**A Study of Labour, Circulation and Agrarian Change**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of  
requirement for the award of the Degree of**

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**in**

**Anthropology**

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### **DECLARATION**

I, hereby, declare that the research embodied in this dissertation titled *Labouring in and away from the village: A study of labour, circulation and agrarian change* is an original work carried out by me under the supervision of Professor P. Venkata Rao, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of a research degree or diploma in any other University.

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation titled *Labouring in and away from the village: A study of labour, circulation and agrarian change*, submitted by Bhim Reddy for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology, is a record of bonafide and independent work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This dissertation has not been submitted either in part or in full to any other university or institution of learning for the award of any other degree.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

India witnessed a historic moment – the working population engaged in agriculture is for the first time outweighed by those working outside agriculture. It raises many questions, one of them being is the *village withering*? The increasing workforce outside agriculture has not, however resulted in a proportional decline in cultivator households. ‘Footloose labour’ is now increasingly the norm. Labouring populations seek work in the city but continue to hold on to land in the village. This study revisits these ‘old’, yet critical questions of land, caste and labour, viewed from the lens of a *village study* in Telangana, a semi-arid region of India.

#### 1.1. Focus and approach of the study

*I did not enter the field “armed with a battery of hypotheses”, and I have no doubt that, given my broad objective, such an equipment would have done more harm than good.*

-- Andre Beteille (1996: 10-11)

This study is focused broadly on the conditions of labouring households of a village in Telangana.<sup>1</sup> The study is conceptualised in the context of evidence that suggests extreme fragmentation of agricultural land, ‘agrarian crisis’ and increasing labour migration from rural areas. A study of the conditions of rural labour inevitably includes the phenomenon of present-day labour circulation and the larger realm of agrarian change. Such a study in India would include a focus on the significance/influence of caste structures in shaping the conditions and forms of labour. As a student of *an* anthropology that emphasises the material basis of interactions between castes – of ‘dominance’ and ‘dependence’ – this study also attempts to understand how agrarian change, which involves fragmentation of land and circulation of labour, influences the relations between castes in a village

The purpose of the study was born out of a preliminary reading that there was a decline in village-level studies that focused on the dynamics of social change in the rural milieu. These were serious concerns across disciplines in India, especially since

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<sup>1</sup> It is in this region that *the first full-length anthropological study* of the ‘Indian Village’ emerged. S.C. Dube’s *Indian Village* (1955) was a study of *Shamirpet* village near the city of Hyderabad, conducted during the years 1950-51; the italicized words are paraphrased from Beteille (1996: 232,236).

the recognition of ‘dominant caste’<sup>2</sup> in social anthropology and ‘gentlemen farmers’ (the ‘gold rush’)<sup>3</sup> in agrarian political economy (discussed later). The ‘liberalisation’ policies of the Indian state, in general and more specifically with reference to agriculture<sup>4</sup>, since the early 1990s drew attention once again to the countryside, but the focus this time has largely been on ‘agrarian crisis’ as a result of such policies, overlooking the caste and class dynamics at work.<sup>5</sup>

Further, this region, Telangana, from where a village conventionally represented the *Indian Village*<sup>6</sup>, like other such semi-arid regions, experienced a trajectory of agricultural (under)development different from regions that witnessed the ‘green revolution’.<sup>7</sup> The agrarian transformation in the latter regions received scholarly attention with regard to caste and class dynamics and ‘new farmers’ movements<sup>8</sup>, while there has been a dearth of scholarship in this area in the ‘dry’ regions.<sup>9</sup>

The study draws from the approach followed in agrarian political economy, which focuses on “the social relations and forms” of “agricultural production and reproduction, property and power” and the dynamics of “technical change”.<sup>10</sup> Further it involves the dynamics of class relations - “on the ways more powerful classes”

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<sup>2</sup>Srinivas, 1955&1959

<sup>3</sup>Thorner, 1967&1969

<sup>4</sup> “Liberalisation of agriculture connotes the promotion of agro-product exports, reduction of fertiliser and power subsidies to the agriculture sector, rolling back of state intervention in the foodgrains market such as price support and procurement policies, pricing of irrigation services, liberalised imports of agricultural products and increased penetration of agriculture by multinational seed and biotechnology firms.”(Chaganti, 2004:2220). This shift is characterised as ‘normal capitalism’ which marked the change in the ideology and practice of States from ‘developmentalism’ to ‘neo-liberalism’ (Radice, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> This deficiency was already recognised by some scholars (see, for example, Harriss-White and Janakarajan, 1997) and later also pointed and discussed by Jhodka (2012). There were, however, exceptions like those in a Special Issue in *Journal of Peasant Studies on Rural Labour Relations In India Today* (1998: Vol.26, No.1) which focused their analyses on class lines, and more importantly included gender in their analyses, but caste dynamics were missing in these studies.

<sup>6</sup> S.C. Dube’s *Indian Village* (1955).

<sup>7</sup> See Farmer, 1986, Nadkarni, 1986&1989, Harriss-White, 1983&2008, Rao, V.M, 1991, Rao, K.P.C, 2008 and others discussed in detail in Chapter-4.; Harriss (1987: 233) remarks, ‘green revolution’ “increased regional disparities and had considerable impact upon the agrarian structures of some regions and almost none at all elsewhere...it has had very little impact at all over much of the central plateau”.

<sup>8</sup> Omvedt, 1994; Brass, 1994

<sup>9</sup> With an exception in the study region of studies in the 1970s and early 80s, all in one block of Medak district (Benson, 1976; Robinson, 1988 and others)

<sup>10</sup> This part of the definition is paraphrased from both Bernstein and Byres (2001:27) and Bernstein (2010a:1)

accumulate “by appropriating surplus from less powerful [classes]”<sup>11</sup>, and whether there are conditions for labour to exercise the right to freely hire out for the existing highest wage or whether such freedom is curtailed to any degree through any means in the process of accumulation.<sup>12</sup>

The political-economy approach emphasises structural inequality within the countryside and between the farm and non-farm sectors, which underlie the “social and spatial arrangements of [the] economy” (Sreshtha, 1989:189). While inequality within the village in terms of ownership of land and other assets has significantly reduced, migration of households in the study is understood largely in the context of persistence and increase of unviable small-farms and the spatial separation of and the relations between the sites of production/employing economy and reproduction of labour.<sup>13</sup> In understanding circulation of labour and also the sustenance of ‘backward’ agriculture, the study draws from the conceptions of production and reproduction as elaborated by Kautsky (1899/1988), Burawoy (1976) and others. The spatial differences in the cost of reproduction reduces production costs in the non-farm sector and sustains circular migration of labouring households on the one hand, and on the other, the incomes from migrant wage labour contributes to the reproduction of otherwise unviable small-farms.

Besides adopting such a perspective, the study also focuses on the significance of caste, gender and kinship and their roles. The assertion of ‘lower’ castes and the aspirations of the youth are considered important elements that go beyond the economic ‘determinist’ interpretation of circulation. The study largely being qualitative in nature, modestly attempts a description of the ‘everyday’ lives of labourers recognising agency on the lines of James Scott’s (1985) ‘everyday forms of resistance’ and Geert de Neve’s (2005) ‘everyday politics’ of labour. It attempts to document everyday struggle for livelihood and the individual’s/household’s conscious strategies that are aimed not only towards incremental improvements in household economic situation but also towards resisting and challenging the unequal relations and attitudes in the village and the city, which are rooted in caste hierarchies. In such

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<sup>11</sup> daCorta, 2010:18; also see Harris-White and Heyer, 2010 for political economy approach.

<sup>12</sup> see Thorner, 1962; Rudra, 1992; Brass, 1990, 1999; Breman, 1996

<sup>13</sup> Such an understanding is drawn from Kautsky (1889/1988), Burawoy (1976), Shrestha (1988), (Ortiz, 2002), Bernstein (2004), Harris-White (2008)

an analysis, the study engages with the relevant notions of bondage, ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ labour and the forms of labour that manifest in such relations. It seeks to understand how individuals involved conceive such forms of labour and their efforts at moving away from relations that constrain their freedom and undermine their dignity, and how past/shared experiences shape such strategies.

This study, in the tradition of *village studies* in India, considers the *village* unit of study for its analysis but also takes into account the spatial stretch of the village households that link the household and village economy with non-farm sectors and urban centres. Instead of depending solely on the second hand narratives of migrant workers in the village, the field study is extended beyond the village borders, to the destinations of migration– urban slums and work sites.

Attwood (2010:42) notes that the “difficult” and “universal problem in social sciences” is to do “justice” to both empirical “variations” and “patterns”, and offer “convincing explanation(s) of these patterns”. Because the households within a village do not exhibit homogeneity in their socioeconomic character and in their position in the division of labour, one had to find valid categories to infer patterns and make sense of the socioeconomic system and its interactions. Anthropologists had initially found caste a useful lens through which to analyse social and economic relations in Indian villages. In course of time, however, studies found the social cleavages of caste that guided and/or coincided with economic roles in the past tended to be blurred. The divisions that a production system entailed were no more strictly based on or coinciding with the lines of caste (Beteille, 1965/1996). It brought about heterogeneity in terms of caste within similar economic roles. Therefore, it was required to search for other relevant categories that are based in the criteria that determine economic roles. This study employs the concept of class to differentiate village households on the lines that some anthropologists have applied it in the context of the Indian village– the criteria of ownership of the means of production (primarily land) and labour services rendered or hired (ibid).

However, since the time such studies were done both the production system as well as the households engaged in it are now more linked to the economy beyond the boundaries of the village, thereby making it difficult to propose any simple classification of the latter based on such criteria. Moreover, the ownership of land or

labour no longer remain the *exclusive* criteria to distinguish the character of a majority of the households. To put it simply, the classes/households *of* the village were engaging in the system of production in different (sometimes previously considered ‘contradictory’) capacities – a member of a landowning household works for a wage inside and/or outside the village, another works in the non-farm sector, another cultivates the household’s land by hiring labour. So, classes/households were neither purely agrarian nor were they exclusively landowners or sellers of labour power. Thus, class categories such as agricultural labourers, tenants, landlords, peasants (small, middle, rich) are found to be less appropriate to define/identify rural households from the field area.

The study, therefore, adopts Bernstein’s (2010a&b) concept of ‘classes of labour’. The character of a majority of households in the study village fits the notion of *classes of labour*, in that they are neither dispossessed of land nor do they own sufficient land but depend largely on wage labour. Although these households engage mostly in wage labour outside the village they maintain an active relationship with land and the village. Such households can neither be termed agricultural labour nor rural labour as they variously combine agricultural (village) and non-farm (urban) wage labour along with own-cultivation. Using the notion of *classes of labour*, the study documents the segmentation within these classes based on relevant criteria such as the extent of land owned and the nature of wage employment. In doing so, it also analyses the overlap and/or disjunction between class divisions and divisions of caste, as was usefully attempted by Beteille (1996) in his village study.

With this brief introduction to the study, this chapter in the second section presents the empirical trends in agrarian change and labour, and the perspectives that capture these trends in the literature. Further, this chapter states the study’s specific objectives, the methodology of the study and provides an outline of the rest of the dissertation.

## **1.2.Labour and Agrarian Change: Empirical trends and perspectives**

The first part of this section discusses some of the perspectives on important trends in agrarian relations in India after Independence, so as to have a better

understanding of the current agrarian situation. Such trends were both intended and unintended consequences of State-directed agrarian, rural and industrial development strategies until the 1980s and the subsequent gradual withdrawal of State from the early 1990s.

The second part of this section deals with the perspectives on rural labour in the larger trends of agrarian change and also the more recent growth of non-farm employment.

### **1.2.1. Agrarian Change**

#### **Land reforms and the *green revolution***

Across academic disciplines, two important ideas permeated critical engagement with the developments in rural post-Independence India. One was the concept of ‘dominant caste’ by M.N. Srinivas, first proposed in 1955 and elaborated in 1959, which influenced the understanding of land, caste and labour relations. The second such idea was Daniel Thorner’s impressionistic observations of the emergence of ‘gentlemen farmers’ in the context of industrialisation that prompted host of studies on agrarian transition in India, which has come to be known as the ‘mode of production debate’ (Thorner, 1967; 1969, which I discuss later).

Dominant caste/s were viewed roughly represented by the substantial landowning and powerful ‘peasant’ castes across regions. Leach considered ‘dominant caste’ as an “integral and universal element in the rural caste system” (noted by Srinivas, 1979:237). In fact, Srinivas (1959) tentatively indicated the presence of such caste groups across regions in India. He also noted not only that in general “the power and activity of caste has increased in proportion as political power passed increasingly to the people” after Independence, but was “also likely to make for the tyranny of the dominant caste” in linguistic states (ibid: 535,542). This recognition was significant not only for an understanding of *Caste in Modern India*, but for the trajectory of State-directed agrarian development.

The initial agrarian reforms aimed at making agriculture dynamic by removing intermediaries between the State and cultivators through the abolition of the *zamindari* system and the push for land reforms that had largely benefitted these caste

groups across regions<sup>14</sup>. Srinivas (1979: 238) remarks, “[o]ne of the major results of land reform has been the transference of land from the ritually high status castes to the *dominant peasant castes* which had a tradition of agriculture and lived in rural areas” (emphasis added). The strategy aimed at ‘radically’ restructuring property relations, did curb absentee landlords to an extent, but hardly benefitted the landless and small cultivators (Rao, J.M, 1998a). The foodgrain shortages during the severe droughts of 1965-67 resulted in India importing 19 million tons of foodgrain (ibid). This food crisis led to the formulation of the New Agrarian Strategy that mainly emphasised increasing production through supply of technology, credit and support prices (ibid). This strategy aimed and involved the following:

...improving productivity by means of rapid technological modernization, based on the adoption of the new HYVs, irrigation, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, deliberately concentrating investments crop-wise and region-wise where returns were expected to be relatively high and certain... It increased agricultural credit and fertilizer subsidies, while also making a commitment to remunerative (minimum support) prices (Rao, 1998a: 216).

Agrarian land reform had ‘social justice’ as an objective and was considered a necessary condition to reduce ‘rural inequality’ and ‘poverty’ besides improving agricultural growth (ibid). The *new agrarian strategy* departed from such an agenda in favour of the singular objective of growth in production (ibid). This ‘selective approach’ was considered to be implicit in the framework and immediate objective of the new strategy: “given the limitations of supply of modern inputs, these should reach those areas and people who are likely to make their most optimum use” (Dasgupta, 1977: 247). This is how once again, the dominant castes with substantial landholdings benefitted, as they were ‘charged’ with the mission of growth in production:

“[L]arge, landed estates, where they still existed, were abolished and tenancy relationships reformed with a view to encouraging a capitalist orientation amongst a well established class of owner-cultivators in India, usually drawn from locally *dominant castes*. This class in particular was charged with the task of increasing production and productivity... Even a very moderate land reform was not on the agenda” (Breman, 2000: 239-40; emphasis added)

Such a strategy, Rao, J.M (1998a: 216, 218) remarks “at least implicitly required unequalizing growth” and therefore resulted in “lop-sided success”. This new

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<sup>14</sup>See Rao, J. M. (1998a); Jodka (2003); Breman (2000).

strategy, what came to be known as the ‘green revolution’<sup>15</sup> that implied not only the technology but the whole package of institutional reform and State support, witnessed debates on its distributional outcomes (discussed in Chapter-4). The initial studies had been mostly critical of the impacts of *green revolution* strategy, expressing concerns over the rising disparities between the rich and the poor (Baker and Jewitt, 2007). In response to such studies and views there were efforts in the later phase by the government to address some of these concerns. Srinivas (1977/2009:416) notes, “[i]t was the radicals’ attack on green revolution that led the government to devise, in the seventies, measures positive and negative to reduce inequalities”.

The *green revolution* led to a substantial increase in agricultural output to the extent that it averted the recurrence of a ‘food crisis’, putting an end to grain imports and almost solving ‘India’s food problem’, and it also served to stabilise food prices<sup>16</sup>. The spread of the ‘second phase’ of the *green revolution* was considered to be ‘wider’ and the growth rate in production was ‘faster’ (Reddy, D.N, 2002).

### **Major Debates**

The *green revolution* prompted several related debates among scholars who engaged in rural sociology and agrarian political economy. One was on the distributional effects of *green revolution*, another was on the relation between the size of land and agricultural productivity, which ensued as a debate on the ‘inverse relationship’ of size of land and productivity. Third was on the nature of agrarian transition, known as the ‘mode of production debate’. The latter also extended to the role of agriculture in industrialisation, and those that emphasised the ‘urban bias’ and those critical of ‘new farmers’ movements’ pointed at the ‘rural-bias incarnate’. I highlight the issues and arguments of these debates in brief through the works that reviewed these debates, and shift the focus to labour and the issues surrounding the question of labour.

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<sup>15</sup>Wolf Ladejinsky (1973:A-133) notes, “the green revolution stands for producing more food and other agricultural products from less land. The key is modernisation of traditional agriculture and this calls for a new package of practices made up of the following: high-yielding varieties, improved farm equipment, substantial inputs of chemical fertilisers and insecticides, which in turn require the indispensable assured supplies of water at specified intervals. To complete the package, other essential items are also required, chief among them being investment capital and production credit, better research and extension services, seed multiplication and processing, stable prices and incentives, and the necessary institutional support for all these. It is the combination of all these factors that is generally equated with agricultural modernization”

<sup>16</sup>See Rao, J. M. (1998a); Jodka (2003); Reddy (2002), Hazell and Ramasamy, 1991; Patnaik, 2000.

There were two concerns that scholars engaged with *green revolution* had. One, the existing economic disparities more or less determine access to technology and other facilities that accentuated the disparities between the rich and the poor in rural areas. The second concern was to do with the increasing disparities between regions that were targeted for implementation of the *green revolution* packages and those that were neglected in agricultural development (see Farmer, 1986, Dhanagare, 1987, 1998; Hazell and Ramasamy, 1991; Baker and Jewitt, 2007).

B.H Farmer who reviewed vast literature dealing with this problem points out that varied views stem from varied 'perspectives' of scholarship and the 'great variety of natural and social environments' in which the villages in the subcontinent are located (ibid:190). Farmer broadly groups those social scientists who adopt a 'technocratic' perspective as 'neo-classical': they hold "the notion that it is sufficient to increase production in the national aggregate... given sufficient growth in agricultural production, all will be well" (ibid:186). He says that these and other "productionist social scientists" "fail to perceive rural poverty"(ibid: 187).

On the other extreme, Farmer summarises the views of some Marxian scholars, who believed that the "'Green Revolution' as having led in a classical Marxist manner to a widening gap between the 'rich peasants' and other classes, and thus to the differentiation of the peasantry, a polarization of society, and (through increasing impoverishment and the loss of land on the part of 'poor peasants') growing landlessness and the 'pauperization' of the lower classes, including dispossessed tenants"(ibid:188). While initial responses of scholars were more hostile to the *green revolution*, the spread of benefits, both direct and indirect, in the later phase were recognised notwithstanding distributional inequalities (Hazell and Ramasamy, 1991; Baker and Jewitt, 2007). However, Farmer(1986:187) concludes that although different sections benefitted, but to different extents, within the *green revolution* areas, it has "increased inter-regional disparities". This is further discussed in Chapter-4 as it is very relevant to the agricultural development in the study region.

The debate on 'inverse relationship' of size of land and productivity of land started in India with A.K. Sen's (1962) article which concluded that "by and large, productivity per acre decreases with the size of holding" (cited in Chattopadhyay and Rudra, 1976:A-104). The 'inverse relationship' was considered to be an important

“economic rationale for redistributive land reform and a small farm bias in agricultural development strategy” (Dyer, 1996:105). Several scholars using Farm Management Data confirmed ‘inverse relationship’ or contested the existence of such a relationship (Barbier, 1984 and Dyer, 1996). Dyer (1996:103), in his critical review of the ‘inverse relationship’, notes that those who asserted the existence of the relationship did so in a “static context” and others suggested “the breakdown of the inverse relationship in the dynamic context of changing technology”. While several factors like intensity of cropping, irrigation, the nature of crop/yields etc differently influence productivity of land, the direct relationship between the intensity of ‘family labour’ which usually corresponds to the smaller size of farms is considered to have a bearing on the existence of ‘inverse relationship’ between the small size of land and higher per unit productivity. However, in the ‘dynamic context’ of ‘new technology’, Dyer shows, that “the inverse relationship breaks down and disappears” (ibid: 128).

Daniel Thorner in his ‘tour notes’ published in *Statesmen* in 1967 suggested “the emergence in India of a group of "gentlemen farmers" and other persons who find it profitable to invest in agricultural production along capitalist lines...” (Thorner, 1969: A-211). Later in his response to Rudra *et al* (1969), he defined “capitalist farms as units based on hired labour producing commodities for sale in the market for profit; a substantial share of these profits are reinvested for the intensification of production, or for enlarging the scale, or both” (ibid). Emergence of such ‘capitalist farmers’, according to Thorner, was a result of ‘industrialisation’: “The resulting demand for raw materials and foodstuffs has sent agricultural prices soaring, particularly in the drought years in the 1960s. In this setting, investment in farm production has become unprecedentedly profitable” (ibid: A-212). The urban ‘middle class households’ which held land in the villages but rented out to tenants started “pouring money into agricultural production” for profits, which he termed as the “gold rush of the 60s”(ibid). Earlier rents on tenanted land moved to urban centres, but this ‘gold rush’ resulted in the “movement of funds in the opposite direction, from cities to the countryside” (ibid). Thorner concluded that the “significance” of the emergence of ‘capitalist farmers’ “lies not in their absolute numbers but in the dynamism which they have brought to the countryside”, and “their

emergence as a significant group in every State is one of the facets of the industrial revolution which is today changing the face of India” (bid).

By then, Rudra *et al* (1969) had already contested Thorner’s (1967) initial assertions. Thorner’s views noted above are his clarifications in response to these scholars. While his views were in the context of industrialisation, the changes brought about by the *green revolution* triggered a debate on the nature of agrarian transition in India, which was called as a debate on ‘mode of production’ (Thorner, A, 1982). This long debate that ensued in the *Economic and Political Weekly* since the 1960s till the early 1980s was summarised in three articles by Alice Thorner (1982) and also selectively by Utsa Patnaik (1990). The debate was broadly concerned with the question of whether there was a growing tendency of capitalist production (relations) in Indian agriculture (Thorner, A, 1982; Patnaik, 1990). Summing up the debate, Thorner (1982:2063) notes, “there would no longer appear to be any doubt that capitalism today dominates Indian agriculture...Yet master-servant types of behaviour, extra-economic constraints, rack-renting and usury have by no means disappeared”

The growth of capitalist farming in India has been accompanied by a transformation of relations of production and forms of exploitation. Servile, debt-bonded, and/or traditionally attached labour has been largely supplanted by free, relatively mobile wage labour, paid (if meagrely) for the most part in cash. Investment in modern, scientific agriculture has expanded enormously, and has resulted, on the whole, in enhanced production, at least of certain crops in certain areas. Tenancy and sharecropping arrangements have in many regions adapted to the new economic and technical requirements (ibid).

### **Class differentiation**

The question of ‘capitalist production’ in agriculture, “class formation” and “class differentiation” and how these could be obtained and analysed at the empirical level (Patnaik, 1990) were informed by the Marxist understanding of ‘capitalist development’ *viz.* the ‘classic’ agrarian question (Thorner, A, 1882; Bernstein, 2004). Bernstein (2004) outlines important aspects of the ‘classic’ agrarian question, a few of which are as follows:

...pre-capitalist agrarian formations are characterized, above all, by the social relation... between landed property and peasant labour: the surplus labour of the latter is appropriated by the former through rent;2) ... the transition to capitalism requires a process of 'primitive' or primary accumulation that establishes the conditions of 'market dependence'...;3) ... this process is registered in the formation (over time) of classes...that exemplify a new (capitalist) social property relation: capitalist landed property, agrarian capital and (proletarian) agrarian labour; 4) ... the logic of the capitalist social property relation...drives the growth of productivity of both labour and land (yields) in agriculture, especially through technical innovation and new technical and social divisions of labour (development of the productive forces) (ibid: 198)

The transformation of agriculture in England, Bernstein (2003:5) notes according to Marx, followed a trajectory that is through "the displacement or dispossession of peasant by capitalist farming (called "the enclosure model")". Lenin emphasised the tendency to class differentiation of peasants, which was a "fundamental addition" to understanding paths of agrarian change, "identifying the possibility of the dissolution of the peasantry through the formation of distinct classes of agrarian capital and wage labour" (ibid:5). Following Lenin's analysis of 'the differentiation of the peasantry' in Russia, Marxist scholars like Utsa Patnaik sought to investigate if such differentiation was underway in Indian agrarian relations (see Patnaik, 1987). She notes:

Marxist concept of the process of class differentiation is that, under the regime of commodity production, the primarily self-employed peasantry gives rise on the one hand to a rich peasant class that increasingly employs the labour of others and thereby appropriates surplus, and, on the other, a poor peasant class that is increasingly obliged to work for others and is thereby increasingly subjected to exploitation. This process gives rise to the formation of peasant classes. At the two poles of the rural class structure, and more or less distinct from the peasantry, stand the landlord, defined by possession of substantial means of production and non-involvement in any manual labour; and the landless labourer, similarly with no self-employment, for the diametrically opposite reason that he possesses no means of production at all and is obliged to live entirely by selling his labour"(ibid:51)

Harriss (1987:227-28) notes that the 'dominant ideas about process of development' hold "that increasing commercialization of rural economies encourages more and more social and economic differentiation amongst producers (essentially as a result of the forces of competition). Over time, therefore, it is expected that a class of relatively large-scale, capitalist agricultural producers is formed, while the mass of peasants is transformed into a proletariat". But since the 1980s, after the debate, the

trajectory of agrarian transition in India did not show such a ‘polar’ class differentiation<sup>17</sup>.

### **Persistence of small-farms**

Fragmentation rather than concentration of land has been the dominant trend with ‘persistence’ of small-scale cultivation (small farms) in India (Shah and Harriss-White, 2011; Harriss, 2013). Contrary to the belief among scholars in the 70s of polarisation of agrarian classes, Byres (1981) and Harriss (1982) argued that there was only ‘partial’ differentiation and the ‘small producers’ continue to ‘persist’. Harriss (1982:227-28) based on his village study of *Randamin* North Arcot, TamilNadu concludes the following:

The mass of rural households is dependant in various ways upon the dominant class of landowner/rich peasant/merchant/moneylenders. The inherent precariousness of small-scale agricultural production is marked in the uncertain production environment of eastern North Arcot, and it has probably been exacerbated over time by human activity...and in the context of increasingly commoditized economy they lead to indebtedness and dependence upon merchants and moneylenders (whose operations are frequently combined). In Randam households...the ‘dependant middle peasantry’ and the ‘semi-proletariat’...are in this position...In such circumstances as these there is no reason to expect that *the small producers will necessarily be pushed out* as in the traditional model of differentiation, but rather it is likely that they will *persist* because of their relationship with merchant-usurers’ capital...(emphasis added). (Ibid: 227-28)

Harriss (1987) showed that the adoption of modern technology was limited until mid 1970s. But it increased across sections by early 1980s, to the extent that it occupied 90% of the area under paddy in the North Arcotvillages. Adoption of technologies by ‘poor peasants’ increased “their compulsive involvement in markets” and “persistent indebtedness” (ibid: 237). However, he asserted that ‘compulsive involvement’ in markets and ‘indebtedness’ rather than contributing to the process of ‘de-peasantisation’ or ‘dissolution’ of small peasants reinforced their survival (ibid). He explained the persistence of small peasants through the ‘inter-linking factors’, such as markets of moneylending, trading and agro-processing inNorth Arcot, which were more profitable than agricultural production(ibid). He shows that a majority of

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<sup>17</sup>Harriss (2013:358) notes , “[s]ome of those who contributed to the ‘mode of production’ debate of the 1970s thought that the differentiation of peasant classes – towards the establishment of an agrarian capitalist class and a substantial rural proletariat – was proceeding apace...”

both rich and poor peasants depend on paddy traders for credit. They extend advances primarily to secure control over the “supplies of grain at the lowest possible price, which could be achieved by establishing the dependence of cultivators upon them so that the cultivators were forced to sell their grain immediately after the harvest when prices are the lowest...” (ibid). He, therefore, concludes “when [r]ates of profit were considerably higher in paddy trading and agro-processing than in agricultural production itself, ... there seemed to be no reason why traders should want directly to take over land so long as this was the case”. He further explains that ‘capitalist farmers’ could not expand the size of their farms despite the “expansion of capitalist production in agriculture” because of the land constraint (ibid). This was interrelated to the “continuing reproduction of smallholding property” due to profitable interlinking factors noted above (ibid).

Another important contribution by Susan Mann and James Dickinson (1978) on ‘natural obstacles to agrarian capitalism’ helps understand why, unlike non-farm industry, large-scale capitalist farms did not expand in certain regions, rather small-farms continued to survive. Mann (1990:32) later clarified and elaborated on what is known as the Mann-Dickinson thesis, which deals with the “peculiar nature of the production processes in certain spheres of agriculture”. Two points are highlighted here. They argue that “non-wage forms of production continue to exist, not because they are preferred avenues of capital accumulation, but because they are un-avoidable features of the modern landscape. That is, they cannot be conquered by capitalist production *at this point in time*” (ibid:33).

Drawing from Marx, they argue that the more the ‘production time’ coincides with ‘labour time’, “the greater” is the “productivity and self-expansion of capital in a given time period” (ibid: 34). Unlike in industry, production of crops requires a “lengthy total production time” for maturity of crops, which exceeds far more than the labour time, and “cannot easily be” reduced (ibid). Their thesis is that “capitalist development progresses more rapidly where the production time can be successfully reduced” and on the contrary the longer production time in agricultural production is “likely to prove to be unattractive to capitalist investment” (ibid). The second ‘natural’ problem with agricultural production is the “perishability of farm products” and vulnerability to “climatic conditions or pest infestations” which in turn result in

market “price fluctuations” and, further, once cultivated there is no scope to control production according to the changes in market price (ibid:37).

The third explanation for the persistence of small peasants can be found in what Byres (1981) observed of the impact of *green revolution* leading to ‘partial proletarianization’. He noted that the *green revolution*’s “most significant contribution has been to throw into increased wage employment large number of poor peasants who continue to own some land and to bring some share-croppers near to the state of pure wage labour”(ibid: 234). The significance of this observation that ‘poor peasants’ are joining ‘wage employment’ outside their own small farms lies also in the possibility of its effect on persistence of small farms. Kautsky (1889/1988) noted the role of wage employment outside peasants’ small farms on the maintenance of such farms in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. While “the peasant appears to remain as a peasant”, employment outside their farms “provides the means by which the imminently bankrupt dwarf-holders can maintain their property” (ibid:191-93). With increasing migration of rural households to urban centres, wage employment not only within rural areas but in the urban centres has contributed to supplement incomes from small holdings and helped to maintain their small farms. Harris (1987: 244) based on his study argued that ‘urban wages’ “help to stabilize small property” and “subsidize rural production”.

### **Classes parting and not parting with land**

Given the nature of the trajectory of agrarian change on the one hand and urbanisation, industrialisation and growth of the informal non-farm economy on the other, one can draw three broad categories of households in their (changing) relation to land and agriculture.

One is the classes/households that erstwhile owned land but no longer own land either as a result of land reforms, i.e., the absentee landlords, or as a result of ‘white-collar’ jobs in urban centres. Srinivas’ observations in relation to ‘dominant caste’ point at these classes in relation to land reforms and urban employment. He pointed at the “the transference of land from the ritually high status castes to the dominant peasant castes” as “[o]ne of the major results of land reform” (Srinivas, 1979: 238). The other can be inferred from his observation that “[t]he Brahmins were

the first to sense the new economic opportunities opened to them through Western education, and they gradually moved to the towns to enter the new white-collar professions. Urban living, the cost of educating children, and the high dowries which the new education and economic opportunities had brought about, gradually caused the Brahmins to part with their land...” (Srinivas,1959:2).One would also find different kind of households that parted with land including owner-cultivators. Gough (1983:278-79) notes, based on her revisits tovillages in Tanjavur between early 1950s and mid 1970s, that two categories of landowners sold their land. One is ‘small rentiers’ who migrated to work in cities and another is ‘peasant cultivators’ some of whom turned ‘agricultural labourers’.

The second class comprises some households who were tenants before land reforms and the *green revolution*. Due to fear of losing ownership rights on land in the context of land reforms, and also as a result of profitable agriculture after *green revolution* there were instances of eviction of tenants, who lost access to cultivable land. Byres (1981) and Gough (1983) noted this trend of displacement of tenants from land.

The third is those classes/households which moved to urban centres for well-paid government and other formal sector jobs or into other enterprising activities but did not part with land. These households either received rent on land or cultivated through hired labour even after diversifying into other economic opportunities. Thorner (1969) pointed at the ‘urban middle class households’ which continued to hold land in the villages cultivated by tenants and, thus, received rents<sup>18</sup>. Balagopal (1987) described ‘provincial propertied class’ of which a family ‘typically’ owns land in the village cultivated either by ‘tenants’ or ‘hired labour’ or managed by one the family members, while others are into various kinds of ‘business’ and/ or other professions<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup>Thorner notes (1969:A-212), [a]s we all know, many city dwellers in India come from families which are at least partly rural. It was always common for urban middle class households to own some land, whether by inheritance or by purchase. These absentee holdings, whatever the size, were normally let out in small lots to tenants. The rents which were thus drawn from the villages to the towns provided a useful supplement to the family's income from business, medicine, law, or other urban occupations”.

<sup>19</sup>In his critique of new ‘peasant movements’ (called as ‘new farmers movements’ by other scholars) in India during the 1980s, Balagopal (1987:1545) notes, “[a] typical family of this provincial propertied class has a landholding in its native village, cultivated by hired labour, bataidars, tenants or farm-servants and supervised by the father or one son; business of various descriptions in towns—trade,

Similarly, Harriss (1982:50) shows that about half of the ‘business community’ in Arni town “own some land” and “almost all operate their lands themselves or through their families”. Vijay (2011) based on his analysis of NSSO data argues that there is an increase from the early 1990s in number of households residing both in rural and urban areas that own land but do not cultivate as they diversified into non-farm activities. He also indicates from his village study data that the latter tendency is correlated to the increase in the incidence of tenancy in the recent times.

Fourth, there is an increasing incidence in the recent decades of small/marginal holding cultivating households, besides landless labourers, working as casual wage workers or in various low paid ‘informal’ sector jobs. In case of these smallholding owners, the earnings from labouring outside agriculture and outside the village help not only to supplement their incomes from small farms but to retain their holdings and subsidise smallholding agricultural production (Harriss, 1987; Harriss-White, 2008). Several recent studies have pointed at this trend of both landless labourers and small holding owners working outside the villages (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001, 2011; Harriss et al, 2010; Jhodka, 2012).

### **Current agrarian situation**

This discussion on agrarian change and debates around the same in the past was presented to help better understand the current changes in agrarian relations. Agrarian structure, in Thorner’s words, is “the network of relations among the various groups of persons who draw a livelihood from the soil...it is the sum of total ways in which each group operates in relation to other groups” (cited in Harriss, 1982:146). This entails the ‘forms’ of ownership and control of land and the relations in the process of production (ibid).

Any understanding of agrarian change broadly involves the changes in ‘agrarian structure’ and the technological and productive improvements in agriculture. Technological improvements and their spread have been recognised since the *green revolution*. The ‘differentiation’ of households involved in agrarian production implies

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finance, hotels, cinemas and contracts—managed by other sons; and perhaps a young and bright child who is a doctor or engineer or maybe even a professor at one of the small town universities that have sprouted all over the country during the last two decades”.

a change in 'agrarian structure'. There had been differentiation but the tendency was not marked by 'centralisation' or 'concentration' of land into large-scale farms on extreme and dispossession and landless labourers on the other. The structure increasingly moved towards smaller landholdings. The explanations for their 'persistence' were discussed above. Besides those factors, the increase in their number was largely because of demographic explosion and inheritance divisions of agricultural land.

By the turn of the millennium, Indian agrarian structure has predominantly emerged as a 'small-farm economy' with more than four fifths (about 85%) of the farming households cultivating small and marginal holdings of land (Reddy and Mishra, 2008; Gupta, 2005). "What land reforms and land redistribution could not do, demography and subdivision of holdings have done to land ownership", Gupta (2005: 752) remarks. The State's role in perpetuation of small-farm production through subsidies and support was considered to be a crucial factor (Harriss, 1987). But the subsequent withdrawal of State support systems since the early 1990s through the 'liberalisation' policy in agriculture is considered to have resulted in 'agrarian crisis' leaving these small-holding cultivators in volatile conditions (Vakhulabharanam, 2005; Reddy and Mishra, 2008; discussed in Chapter-4).

However, increases in such small farms in 'crisis' have not reduced, but increased the dependence of cultivators across sections on the interlinked markets of credit, inputs, trade and agro-business (Vakulabharanam, 2005; Reddy and Mishra, 2008). It has further increased the dependence on new technologies, of inputs and machinery in agricultural production (Harrisset *al*, 2011; Jhodka, 2012). Without displacing the small landholders from production activities, national and "transnational agri-business companies" have established their reach through intensified commercialisation "upstream and downstream of farming".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Bernstein (2010:89-90) notes, "[i]mportant 'globalizing' tendencies that affect agriculture directly include new strategies of sourcing by transnational agribusiness; new forms of organization and regulation of global commodity chains for agricultural products; the high profile of agricultural trade and its regulation in the agenda of, first, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) from the mid- 1980s and now of the World Trade Organization (WTO); and the drive of transnational agribusiness (chemical and seed) companies to patent, monopolize, produce and sell genetic (plant and animal) material, and to lock in farmers (in both North and South) to its use".

Three decades after Byres (1981) observed the increasing participation of poor peasants in wage labour, there was a drastic increase in their numbers that joined casual wage not only in agriculture but particularly outside agriculture, in non-farm sectors. Thus, almost every rural household has links with the wider economy that are significant for their reproduction (Lerche, 2010; Shah and Harriss-White, 2011). Further, studies show that urban wage incomes have become crucial for the 'persistence' of small-holding production.

If this is the predominant agrarian situation, it brings to the fore the questions around the conditions of labouring households of the villages. If the holdings have predominantly become small and marginal, the following questions need to be addressed. What is the scope for labour hiring? Is there a distinguishable category of 'agricultural labourers'? What are the labour arrangements in such an economy? How are households' economies organised?

## **1.2. Rural labour relations**

### **The *Jajmani* system**

Anthropologists found caste as the most important principle of social organisation in Indian villages during the early studies. Economic interactions between families in the villages were also largely on the lines of caste-specific occupations. The relations in production and exchange of goods and services followed a system in which the 'occupation' or 'service' was "determined by caste" (Lewis and Barnouw, 1956:6). This system was first systematically analysed and termed as *jajmani system* by Wiser based on his study in mid 1930s of Karimpur village in north India (ibid). Later, several studies pointed out the existence of such a system in various parts of the country although with certain 'modifications' (ibid; Harper, 1959). Reviewing earlier descriptions of such a system in various parts of the country, Harper (1959: 761) defines this system broadly as follows:

...the *jajmani* system is a network of alliances between different groups individuals, following different occupations and living within a contiguous geographical area, to exchange their products and services directly

with one another. The system appears with modifications and adaptations to varying conditions in different parts of India.

Central to such 'division of labour' was caste, and the nature of exchange of products and services were based on the specific 'hereditary' occupations or specialisation' of castes (ibid; Gould, 1964). "Basically, the distinction" in this system was "between the land-owning, cultivating castes, on the one hand, who dominate the social order and the landless craft and menial castes, on the other, who are subordinate within it" (Gould, 1958: 429). Those families exchanging their products or services to the landowning families had exclusive 'rights' to serve certain families and these 'rights' were inheritable like property rights that kept caste-occupational 'monopolies' more or less stable (Srinivas, 1955; Lewis and Barnouw, 1956).<sup>21</sup>

While these studies noted a gradual decline of the system,<sup>22</sup> it persisted in varying degrees or only for certain occupations (Benson, 1976; Harriss, 1982).

Most of the studies on the *jajmani system* focused on the exchanges between the landed castes and the specialist artisan and service castes, and less on the exchanges between landed castes and agricultural labourers (Bremner, 1974/1993). This was also due to the distinction made between the 'religious' and 'economic' nature of the professions, where the occupation of agricultural labourers was considered economic in nature and, therefore, not part of the *jajmani* system (ibid). However, Dumont considered agricultural labour to be religiously marked because manual work was considered degrading (Dumont, 1988/2009). In other words, these studies did not focus on the major part of the exchanges in the village agrarian economy i.e. between landowners and agricultural labourers.

## **Patronage**

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<sup>21</sup> Srinivas (1955:15) notes, "the stability of caste monopolies is enforced by family inheritance. That is, the right to serve a particular family – the right of making plows for it, or of periodically shaving the heads of its male members, or of washing its clothes – is treated as a heritable and divisible right. Thus the partitioned brothers of a Barber family divide among themselves the families which they were all jointly serving before partition".

<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Gough (1960:84), reviewing Beidelman's work on *jajmani* system, notes, "[i]n modern times, "a great many factors" are seen to be disrupting the *jajmani* system. They include population increase, new, caste-free occupations, the partial shift to cash payment for single, contractual jobs by kamins on behalf of *jajmans*, the extension of cash-crops and decline of subsistence farming, the effects of national and international markets on food prices, the replacement of many artisans' goods by foreign imports, and the general impoverishment of a majority of both *jajmans* and kamins".

Srinivas (1955/2009), however, briefly discussed the relation between the landowner and labourer (as master and servant) in his broader analysis of the system of patron and clients: “institutionalized vertical relationships between individuals and, through them, between families. These relationships include the relationships between master and servant, landowner and tenant, and creditor and debtor; they may be viewed collectively as the relationships between patrons and clients” (ibid: 65). In this he describes *jita* system, which involves “contractual servanthip”:

Under this a poor man contracts to serve a wealthier man for one to three years. The terms of the service including the wages to be paid by the master, are usually fixed in writing. The master advances, at the beginning of the service, a certain sum of money to the servant or his guardian, and this is worked by the servant...The sum paid is exclusive of food and clothing, which is the master's duty to provide. Frequently, before the period of the service ends, the servant or his guardian borrows another sum of money and thus extends the service. Formerly it was not unknown for a man to spend all his working life between ten and seventy years of age in the service of one master.

Later studies concerned themselves with the interrelations of the agrarian and social structure and shifted the focus to the relationships between the landowning castes and agricultural labourers (Beteille, 1965/1996; Breman 1974/1993; Gough, 1983; Mencher,1983;Harriss, 1982). Some of these studies reveal that the relationships between the landed employers and the agricultural labourers were also characterised by ‘labour attachment’, ‘bondage’, ‘patronage’ and ‘exploitation’. Similar to the *jita* system discussed by Srinivas, Gough(1983:279) talks about the *pannayal* relationships and ‘regular coolies’ besides ‘casual coolies’.

The *pannayal* system, she considered, was ‘a kind of debt-peonage’, which derived from the “agricultural slavery prevalent in Thanjavur until 1860s”. In 1952, she found that some labourer families preferred to be employed as *pannayals*, as this form of employment provided higher wages and regular employment, although it involved longer working hours. Between 1952 and 1976, she found that this relationship was ‘disappearing’ (ibid). Harriss (1982) described the prevalence of ‘padial’ relationship between the landed and the labourer households in terms of ‘patron-client’ relationships, which was not a ‘hereditary’ relation.

*Padials* were labourers employed ‘permanently’ to do “all kinds of work” including “household chores” (ibid:122). They are based on ‘simple contracts’ which

could end after a season or a year, but “more than half of them have been in employment of the same farmer throughout their working lives” (ibid:123). Harriss, did not find that these ‘attached labourers’ were ‘bond servants’: “the relationships between them and their masters are marked by respect and cordiality, the paternalism of the master being reciprocated in clientship” (ibid).He interpreted such relationships in terms of patronage. *Agamudaiyan* caste families‘attached’ labourers through ‘debt relations’ and thus, ensured a regular supply of labourers during periods of labour scarcity. On the other hand, labourer increased “the security of his livelihood by assuring himself of employment and by being able to call upon the assistance of his patron”(ibid:240).The relations of patronage between castes are based on “exploitation” but are “made to appear legitimate by the guarantee of the ‘right to subsistence’” (ibid: 238).Such ‘actions’ involving the notions of ‘looking after’ the landless and the ‘lower’ castesand providing a ‘subsistence guarantee’ in turn ‘legitimised the ‘dominance’ of *agamudaiyans*(ibid: 242-44).

On similar lines of Srinivas’ ‘patron and client’ relationships, but for the first time in immense detail Jan Breman (1974) analysed *hali* system, a form of labour service which existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century between the landowners (*anavilbrahmins*) and landless labourers (*dublas*). He analysed this labour relationship in terms of a system of patronage. Further, he analysed the changes that have occurred in *hali* system in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the existing relationships between landowners and agricultural labourers during his initial fieldwork in 1962 and 1963 in south Gujarat. Revisiting the field many a times later on, Breman had closely studied the conditions of landless labourers and the relations between them and the landowners (Breman, 1974, 1985, 1993, 1996)<sup>23</sup>.

He contested earlier explanations of bondage that were ‘exclusively’ based on ‘economic grounds’ and did not cover all facts<sup>24</sup>. Instead, Breman argued that the relationship between the landlords and agricultural labourers should be interpreted in the light of a “more general pattern of relationships, which prevailed among the

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<sup>23</sup> See Breman (1974, 1985, 1993, 1996)

<sup>24</sup> “[I]n representing bondage as a form of unfree labour, investigators have heretofore paid attention only to factors arising either from a need of labourer, leading to forced attachment, or from a need of security, leading to voluntary servitude. These factors have in common that they explain bondage as it existed in the past on exclusively economic grounds and purely as a relation of labor” (Breman 1993:12)

various castes in the traditional society”, called the *jajmani* system (Breman, 1993: 12). Pointing out that many authors did not regard the relations between the landlords and agricultural labourers as part of *jajmani* relations, Breman insisted landlords and agricultural labourers were ‘partners’ in the *jajmani* system<sup>25</sup>. He interpreted the *jajmani* system as a form of patronage<sup>26</sup>. In such a view, the *jajmani* system is a “mechanism not only for distribution of goods and exchange of labour but also for the allocation of power and prestige” (ibid:18). A patron increased his wealth through his ‘esteem’ and ‘influence’ for which the “support of his clients” was essential (ibid). Patronage entailed that:

“the servant was not only a labourer but also a client, and as such he was entitled to affection, generosity, and intercession on the part of his master, who, as a patron, had to guard and promote the interests of his subordinate. Conversely, the servant owed his master respect and loyalty. His obligations were not restricted to labour, but included serving the interests of his patron and standing by him in all contingencies. Total accountability on the one hand and unconditional loyalty on the other exceeded the obligations of the delivery of an amount of labor and a suitable remuneration. (ibid:20)

Breman argues that the relationship was unequal, although patron was keen on enhancing his power and prestige, and not primarily his income. “The patron’s own interest was important, but to reach his ends he had to make sure, to some extent at least, of the affection and loyalty of his...clientele”. The *jajmani* system as a form of patronage implicitly mitigated exploitation, while at the same time it contributed to its continued existence.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Breman concludes that bondage in the past “should be interpreted as a form of unfree labour, complicated and mitigated by a relationship of patronage”.<sup>28</sup>

However, Breman notes that the inter-caste relationships have changed so radically that the usage of the term *jajmani* in the present village situation is no longer justified. *Hali* system (*haliprata*) as it existed in the past, conceptualised by Breman

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<sup>25</sup>Breman (1993:13-16)

<sup>26</sup>Breman (1969:21) defines patronage as “a pattern of relationships in which members of hierarchically arranged groups possess mutually recognized, not explicitly stipulated rights and obligations involving mutual aid and preferential treatment. The bond between patrons and clients is personal, and is contracted and continued by mutual agreement for an indeterminate time (cited in Breman 1993: 18)

<sup>27</sup>Breman (1993: 20)

<sup>28</sup>Breman (1993: 21)

in terms of patronage had almost disappeared during his study in the 1960s. But, the bondage of the *dublas*, the caste of agricultural labourers, continued.<sup>29</sup>

According to Breman, the disintegration of the *halisystem* marked the disappearance of patronage. Such a process, he terms as ‘depatronisation’ resulted in the ‘depersonalisation’ of landlords’ relationships with the agricultural labourers, who nevertheless did not become any less dependent.<sup>30</sup> He explains the disappearance of patronage as follows:

The possibility of selling an increasing proportion of the agrarian output on the market led to commercialization of the relationships between landlords and agricultural labourers. The allowance paid to *dublas*, which in subsistence economy had been based on various “obligations” towards the landlord, increasingly took on the character of a wage payment in exchange for a labour performance in the market economy, and it was paid in money. The amount was no longer related to the minimally defined needs of the agricultural labourers, but was based on the supply of labor and on the control exerted over them by the landlords. (Breman, 1993: 220)

The grip of the members of the dominant caste on the *dublashas* become more depersonalised, being dictated by income maximisation. The agricultural labourers’ right to work is no longer recognised, their social security no longer guaranteed. In the endeavour of the members of the dominant castes to attain more esteem and influence within and outside the village, the *dublas* have been changed from subjects into objects (Breman 1993: 221).

The relationships between the land holding families and the labourer families that anthropologists like Srinivas and Breman analysed in terms of patronage that obtained between the dominant and dependent castes. The elements of patronage and ‘subsistence’ guarantee that legitimised the relations and of dominance are considered to have gradually declined, but ‘attached’ labour continued in agriculture. Such forms of ‘attached’ labour across the country had given way to intense debates since Independence on the bonded and ‘unfree’ nature of these labour forms. Further, with growth of non-farm informal employment, such forms of labour that determined the conditions of labourers and wages were shown to be replicated in non-farm activities.

### **Debt-bondage and *unfree* labour in Independent India**

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<sup>29</sup>Breman (1993: 110-230)

<sup>30</sup>Breman (1993: 210-230)

Government of India (Ministry of Labour) had undertaken a nation-wide *Agricultural Labour Enquiry* in 1949.<sup>31</sup> This enquiry made an important distinction of ‘agricultural labourers’<sup>32</sup> by dividing them into “casual” and “attached” labourers.<sup>33</sup> ‘Casual’ labourers are those “who are paid at the market rates and ‘attached’ labourers are those “who, whenever required by their master, have to work for him and are not ordinarily free to seek employment elsewhere” (cited in Thorner, 1962: 177). Further, ‘attached’ workers were defined as those who “are more or less in continuous employment and are under some sort of contract with employers during the period of employment”, and casual workers as “workers other than attached. They are employed from time to time according to exigencies of work” (ibid).

The conditions depicted in general of the ‘attached’ labourers<sup>34</sup> with ‘frequent cases of life-long and hereditary employment’ involving debts, and particularly, they being ‘not free to seek employment elsewhere’ in view of the contracts with employers raised concerns on their conditions and also debate on what forms constitute *free* and *unfree* labour relations. Thorner (1962), contested the enquiry’s depiction of lack of freedom as a characteristic feature of attached labourer and only of attached labourer and not of casual labourer. Drawing from the evidence provided by the same enquiry, Thorner, while admitting the existence of such a category of *unfree* workers, observes that “no single test such as liberty to take up another job,

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<sup>31</sup>“This is the first and largest socio-economic enquiry of its kind conducted in Asia along the lines laid down by international bodies, like the ILO and the UN and according to the scientific principles of sampling under expert technical guidance” (V.V. Giri, Minister of Labour, Foreword to Vol. I of *Report on Intensive Survey*: 1954).

<sup>32</sup>The enquiry defined agricultural worker as “a person who... is engaged in agricultural operations as a hired labourer for wages for 50 percent or more of the total member of days worked by him or her during the previous year”.

<sup>33</sup> The attached/casual labour distinction of the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry (1950-51) reproduced the earlier dichotomy of long-term farm servant and casual field labourer utilised by the 1921 Census of India (see Brass, 1990).

<sup>34</sup>“Attached workers are engaged either for a year or at least for a month, but frequent cases of life-long and even hereditary employment were noticed during the enquiry. Driven into debts by their poverty, the agricultural workers have to render life-long service to their creditors whom they cannot repay otherwise.... The average agricultural labourer is not infrequently compelled in times of stress to mortgage his personal liberty. In return for a small sum of money he may happen to need at the moment, he agrees to serve the man from whom he has borrowed. The money is not repaid, nor is it intended to be repaid; but the borrower remains a life-long bond slave of his creditor... Involuntary employment is a characteristic feature of agricultural economy. It prevails generally among attached workers whose contracts of employment are determined by the force of tradition and custom. With a view to making the attached workers remain in the service for a long time, it is usual for landholders to advance [interest free] loans.... The inability of workers to repay the advances has led to certain practices of exacting labour either at nominal wages or even without them” (cited in Brass, 1990:54-55).

steady employment or the existence of a contract will suffice to separate out the genuinely “attached” workers” (ibid). He concludes:

When a labourer is described as not “free to seek employment elsewhere”, it may simply be the case that he has freely agreed to remain in a particular job. On the other hand a labourer committed to a particular employer by reason of debt or land-allotment may be employed only from time to time according to exigencies of work. Thus an attached worker may be employed on a casual basis while a completely free worker may be employed continuously on a long term contract (ibid:180)

The *Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry, 1956-57*, retained the distinction of the agricultural labourers into casual and attached. But the meaning of ‘attached labourer’ was modified based on whether or not it involved ‘debt-bondage’ and/or ‘tie-in-allotment’ (land-allotment) and the presence or absence of which would accordingly imply unfreedom/freedom to work elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> In this classification of attached labour, service against an advance wage for a stipulated time was considered free, while service in view of the inability to repay a loan is considered unfree.<sup>36</sup> Although there was “loss of individual freedom” and wages paid were low in attached labour form, the enquiry noted that it had an “advantage” in terms of “security of employment”.<sup>37</sup> The subsequent enquiries covered all the rural households and accordingly the next enquiry was termed as Rural Labour Enquiry. In the first *Rural Labour Enquiry, 1963-64*, and also in the subsequent enquiries the term ‘attached’ was completely abandoned. The distinction of casual and attached labourers followed in the first and second *Agricultural Labour Enquiries* was replaced

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<sup>35</sup>The Second Enquiry classified ‘attached’ labourers into four categories based on the following criteria: 1) with no debt-bondage or tie-in-allotment; 2) with debt-bondage; 3) with tie-in-allotment; and 4) with both debt-bondage and tie-in-allotment.

<sup>36</sup> “Some employers make advances against wages to attached workers on condition that they would continue to be in service for a specific period. In some cases, loans with or without interest are given and the inability of workers to repay them is exploited to keep them in service on low wages. In some States, attached workers are allowed a small piece of land or house-site free of rent and they work for their employers, at times the entire family, on depressed wages. In view of their inability to repay loans, attached workers continue to work for their employers, even from generation to generation. The contract of employment is thus either free, renewable at the end of the specified period or it contains certain stipulations varying according to prevailing practices and customs in a region”. (The Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry 1956-57, Vol. I: 41-42).

<sup>37</sup>In spite of contractual obligations, which at times deprived attached workers of their freedom, the redeeming feature is continuity of employment for a longer period even if at times it be at low wages... Usually there is loss of individual freedom for the labourer though he secures compensatory advantage in the form of security of employment... There is continuity of employment for farm hands though the wages they are paid, when emoluments are reduced to a daily wage rate, may sometimes be lower than the wage rate casual labourers get. (ibid: 64-87).

with ‘regular’ and ‘casual’ in the *Rural Labour Enquiries*. The distinction was merely in terms of the duration of employment – the short term employment as casual and the long term employment as regular (see Brass, 1997).

There was official recognition that incidence of debt-bondage continued in various forms, and therefore, the government of India abolished all forms of labour that were considered as bonded labour through *The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976*. Traditional forms of labour attachment like *jita, hali, padial, pannaiyal*, described above, across the country were considered as ‘forced labour’ and ‘presumed’ to have a creditor and debtor relation.<sup>38</sup> Beyond these forms, it further specified what constitutes ‘bonded labour system’, which broadly includes all such forms where a labourer or a family is constrained to render service with or without wage or for lower wages either because of social practice/custom, caste etc. or in view of debt. However, studies show that bondage and *unfree* labour continue in various sectors in recent times despite its abolition legally (discussed below).

For Marxian scholars the distinction between ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ labour was significant in their analysis of agrarian transition in India. Formation of a ‘free’ labour force was considered to be one of the characteristic features of capitalist development in agriculture. The notion of ‘free labourers’ was drawn from Marx<sup>39</sup>. Further, the distinction between free and *unfree* forms of labour was an indicator of the conditions of labourers and their bargaining power. In Indian agrarian context, there were several

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<sup>38</sup> The Act notes, [th]e existence of an agreement between the debtor and creditor is ordinarily presumed, under the social custom, in relation to the following forms of forced labour, namely Adiyamar, Baramasia, Basahya, Bethu, Bhagela, Cherumar, Garru-galu, Hali, Hari, Harwai, Holya, Jana, Jeetha, Kamiya, Khundit-Mundit, Kuthia, Lakhari, Munjhi, Mat, Munish system, Nit-Majoor, Paleru, Padiyal, Pannayilal, Sagri, Sanji, Sanjawat, Sewak, Sewakia, Seri, Vetti.

<sup>39</sup> Rudra (1994: 77) notes “the following passage is one of the most frequently quoted from Marx, supposedly containing the full essence of the concept of free labour”: “... free labourers, in the double sense that neither they themselves form part and parcel of the means of production, as in the case of slaves, bondsmen, and co., nor do the means of production belong to them, as in the case of peasant-proprietors; they are, therefore, free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own”. Marx elaborates on this idea in the following passage: “The immediate producer, the labourer, could only dispose of his own person after he had ceased to be attached to the soil and ceased to be the slave, serf or bondsmen of another. To become a free seller of labour-power, who carries his commodity wherever he finds a market, he must further have escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprentices and journeymen, and the impediments of their labour regulations. Hence, the historical movement, which changes the producers into waged workers, appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of guilds... But, on the other hand, these new freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements”. (Marx, 1954 cited in Rudra, 1994).

forms of labour employment exhibiting similarity and variation within and between regions. The distinction based on freedom or constraints on such freedom was useful in understanding these forms. Thorner (1962: 21-22) defined and explained a free and *unfree* labourer as follows:

A free labourer is one who is able to accept or reject the conditions and wages offered by the employer. If he wishes he may refrain altogether from working. Once having a job, he can decide to give notice and quit. Economic stringency may indeed compel a free labourer to agree temporarily to terms he does not consider favourable. But his basic right to refuse work or to seek alternative employment remains uncompromised. An *unfree*, or bond, labourer, by contrast, is one whose bargaining power is virtually non-existent, or has been surrendered. Such a labourer does not possess the right, or has yielded the right, to refuse to work under the terms set by his master. Through custom, compulsion, or specific obligation, the bond labourer is tied to his master's needs. He can neither quit nor take up work for another master without first receiving permission.

The 'mode of production debate' in the context of *green revolution* that concerned with the changing nature of agrarian relations in India also focused on the employment relations in agriculture. Brass (1997: 339) notes, "much of the theoretical disputes about the presence, absence... of capitalism and semi feudalism has turned on the presence or absence in such contexts of unfree labour". This is because, "free wage labour is supposed to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of the capitalist relations of production, if not the only one..."(Rudra, 1994: 75). There was disagreement on the latter issue among the scholars who participated in the debate. Broadly, there were two views. Brass summaries the two different views on 'unfree' labour in the debate as follows:

... the protagonists belonged to one of the two camps: those who interpreted unfreedom as a pre-capitalist (= feudal/semi-feudal) relation, and those who by contrast maintained that unfree labour was either compatible with capitalism or indeed its preferred relational form. Exponents of the semi-feudal thesis maintained that money lending and debt bondage were- and are - archaic relations; because bond labour was regarded by them as an obstacle to capitalist development, unfree labour in the Indian countryside was categorised as a pre-capitalist remnant to be eliminated by capital at the first opportunity. In the unfreedom-as-a-pre-capitalist-relation framework, therefore, which denies that accumulation is possible in the context of non-mechanised production based on

unfree labour, debt bondage is regarded as either unconnected with or indeed an obstacle to capitalist development. Others, however, took- and take- the opposite view, and argued that unfree labour in India is not merely compatible with capitalism but is in fact reproduced by it (Brass, 1997: 339-40).

The distinction between 'economic' and 'extra-economic' constraints was considered to be the distinguishing principle between free and unfree labour relations. In most of the societies there are unequal material conditions, which make it compulsory for some to work for others. This compulsion is of economic nature i.e. economic coercion which is common to both free and unfree labour. But when there is extra-economic coercion involved in the relation between the employer and worker, it is considered as unfree labour<sup>40</sup>. Rudra (1987) and Bardhan (1984) distinguished between 'voluntary' contracts involved in long-term attachment of labour and 'debt-bondage'. They suggest that the latter involves 'extra-economic' coercion while the former is based in mere economic compulsion. Bardhan (1984) argued that the current forms of labour attachment involving advance are 'voluntary contracts' at the end of which labour 'reserves the right' to end the contract after the specified duration. And, these are different from 'debt-bondage' whose 'frequency of incidence' is 'insignificant' (ibid). He insisted that the distinction between 'debt-bondage' which involved 'social' and 'legal' sanctions in the past needs to be distinguished from 'voluntary contracts' based in economic coercion<sup>41</sup>.

Brass (1999) contested such distinction between voluntary and involuntary contracts to define 'free' and 'unfree' relations. He convincingly argues that any constraint on the freedom of a worker to hire himself out for the highest wage in the

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<sup>40</sup> 'Economic coercion' is considered to be a "universal phenomenon" because of the "unequal and asymmetric relation between the poor and rich, resulting in the economic dependence of the labourer on the employer (Bardhan (1987); Rudra (1993). In this sense, 'there is no society where the act of producing goods and services can ever be totally free'(Banaji, 2003). Whereas the extra-economic coercion (or constraints) is the "various restrictions imposed by political powers as well as social institutions on the labourers"(Bardhan, 1993: 79).

<sup>41</sup> Bardhan notes, "[hi]storically, agrarian labour-tying brings to mind the blatant cases of obligatory service by the tenant-serf to the lord of the manor (as in the classic instance of European feudalism) or those of debt peonage to moneylender-cum-landlord as obtained in many parts of the world. These are clearly cases in which tying involves a continuing lack of freedom on the part of labourer and the sanctions underline the employer's authority are based primarily on social and legal compulsion, or what Marxists often call extra economic coercion. This is to be distinguished from the case where the labourer voluntarily enters long-duration contracts with his employer and reserves the right to leave unconditionally at the end of the specified period. In situations of widespread poverty and unemployment, this freedom to choose one's employer may sometimes be perilously close to the freedom to starve, yet conceptually the distinction between extra economic coercion and economic exploitation on the basis of unequal but voluntary contracts is important" (ibid: 82)

market at any time constitutes 'unfree' labour. A labourer who 'accepts' or 'requests' an advance and enters a contract 'voluntarily', "exits from the free labour market 'voluntarily'" (ibid:11). Although such "form lacks the coercive appearance of bonded labour", it constrains the capacity of a labourer to "commodify" his labour at any point of time (ibid:10). As the "labourer works to pay off the debt rather than for a wage", forms of labour that involve advance/debt result in the labourer receiving lower wages than those prevalent in the market (ibid:12). In other words, any long-term contract that involves a labourer serving against an advance/debt is considered as 'unfree' labour.

The explanation as to why bonded labour existed was largely agreed to be a result of shortage of labourers in the past. Further, because of rising demand for labour due to intensification of agriculture after 'green revolution' and 'exodus' of labour due to non-farm employment opportunities there was prevalence or increase in 'attached/'bonded/'unfree' labour (Bhalla, 1976; Mundle, 1979; Bardhan, 1984; Brass, 1990). However, such causal relation between 'tightening of market' and attached labour may not be applicable across regions and times, and it doesn't explain the incidence of such 'unfree' relations in the context of excess supply of labour.

Lerche (1995:512), therefore wonders, "tightening of the labour market would normally be expected to increase the bargaining power of the labourer, rather than enabling the employers to develop repressive labour relations". He argues that "a roughly similar labour demand and supply situation may lead to very different labour relations" (ibid). The landowners would usually 'prefer' to establish bonded relations for a continuous and cheap supply of labour. But the question is "whether they are powerful enough to do it" (ibid: 507). Therefore, Lerche insists that one needs to consider 'balance of power' between the employers and labourers which is "indeed by the labour demand and supply situation" but not solely determined by 'economic' factors (ibid).

Breman offers a nuanced interpretation of labour relations that obtain in recent times. He distinguishes earlier forms of 'debt-bondage' from the new forms of labour that restrict the freedom of labourers to hire themselves to the highest payer even in a context of 'excessive' availability of labourers. Based on his revisits to the field in 1980s and 1990s, Breman concludes that 'bondage still remains as an important

mechanism to control labour which he calls 'neo-bondage' (Breman, 1993). But it is different from the bondage that 'marked the existence of farm servants' which came to an end (ibid). It is a result of the 'materialistic and ideological changes' that have occurred between landowners and landless in the countryside of south Gujarat (ibid). Breman notes:

To continue to define the present relationships between farmers and workers in terms of bonded labour creates problems in my view. Firstly, because the dominant party refuses to accept the concomitant attachment, and secondly, because the dominating party is unable to make that bondage effectual. An indication of the basic freedom of movement of even a regularly employed farm hand is that he shows no scruples at all in deserting his employer whenever a more attractive alternative arises, and that the farmer is ultimately unable to prevent his subordinate from leaving him without having repaid outstanding loans. (ibid: 309).

Thus, Breman (1996) concludes, "[d]ebt bondage is, and will continue to be, the method by which the employers ensure themselves of a supply of cheap and unskilled labour"<sup>42</sup>. However, he distinguishes feudal bondage marked by 'patronage', which provided some 'protection' and a 'subsistence guarantee' to bonded clients, from neo-bondage which is 'less personalized', 'more contractual' and 'monetized' relation (ibid:168-69). Such forms of 'neo-bondage' result from 'the weak market position of the subordinated party, but are affected in a 'social framework based on capitalism' (ibid). In other words, "unfree labour may well and actually does go together with a drive towards capitalist accumulation dominating the economy of both rural and urban India" (ibid).

### **Non-farm employment and circulation of rural labour**

Many interrelated developments both in the countryside and urban areas, particularly after independence, in turn significantly shaped the conditions of rural labouring population. Some of these are high growth in population, intensification of agriculture, growth in industrial and other non-farm employment and circulation of labourers. Growth in non-farm employment also in turn led to disproportionate

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<sup>42</sup>Breman (1993: 297-316); see also Breman (1996: 168-169)

participation of female workers in agriculture, called as ‘feminisation’ of agricultural labour.

Two streams of movements of labour occurred since the ‘green revolution’ and the increase of non-farm employment particularly after the 1970s. One, because of the unequal regional agricultural development after the ‘green revolution’ seasonal migration of labourers from ‘backward’ and dry land regions to the irrigated regions increased. Due to increased demand for labourers in these irrigated areas, seasonal migrants were employed in harvesting and other activities related to paddy, wheat, sugarcane etc (Breman, 1985, Rogaly, 1998, Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001; Rogaly *et al*, 2001). Two, population pressure on land on one side and a complimentary increase of non-farm employment resulted in temporary migrations of labourers from villages to the urban centers (Breman, 1985; 1994; Harriss, 1982; 1991, Bhalla, 1998; Kapadia and Lerch, 1998; Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001). Such movement intensified with decreasing significance of agriculture and agricultural employment on the one side and growing significance of non-farm incomes and economic diversification of rural households (Shah and Harriss-White, 2010; Lerche, 2012).

Migration of labourers from rural areas (discussed in detail in Chapter-7) was understood primarily as a ‘survival strategy’ in a context of pressure on agricultural land in the 1980s (Breman, 1985). It was also explained as an employers’ strategy to prefer docile migrant labour to ‘local’ labourers, to ensure cheap labour supply (Breman, 1994, 1996). Later, it was also seen as a movement of men for better paid works in non-farm work, while women largely remained in low paid agricultural work (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001; 2011).<sup>43</sup> Migration was largely seen earlier as a result of economic backwardness of a region, as it occurred largely in regions that had scarce employment opportunities. Therefore, policies were aimed to ‘reduce out-migration’ and to ‘reduce migration pressures’ (de Haan and Rogaly, 2002). Since the last decade more studies started pointing out the significance of migration for the livelihoods of rural households.<sup>44</sup> Recent studies also show such preference of work outside agriculture as a form of “assertion” of the ‘lower’ castes and land poor labourers that

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<sup>43</sup> Also see Bennet (1992); Kapadia and Lerch (1998); Lerch (1998); Srivastava (1998); daCorta and Venkateswarlu (1998)

<sup>44</sup> See deHaan and Rogaly (2002) (eds) Special issue on ‘labour mobility’; Mosse et al, 2002; Deshingar et al, 2008; Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001;2011

avoid working for the ‘dominant’ castes and also a preference for urban life and work (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Gupta, 2005; Jhodka, 2012).

The gender ideologies influence participation of women significantly in migrant work. Regional differences in cultural ideologies related to women’s work outdoors and outside the villages constrain women’s mobility in certain regions like in north India (deHaan, 1997; Rogaly, 1998; Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001;2011). Mobility of women is also constrained by the ‘masculinised’ nature of non-farm industry as well as because of the burden of domestic responsibilities (Harriss-White, 2008). Thus, their share in non-agricultural employment remained very low (Lerche, 1998; Srivastava, 1998).

Studies show that such selective mobility of men seeking work in non-farm sectors both in urban and rural areas has resulted in ‘feminization’ of agricultural labour, where women form majority of workforce in agriculture (daCorta and Venkateswarlu, 1998; Garikipati, 2008). The increasing burden of domestic consumption responsibilities is said to have resulted in ‘feminisation’ of ‘unfree’ labour (daCorta and Venkateswarlu, 1998; Kapadia, 1995; 2000).

While ‘attached’ labour form seems to be on the decline in agriculture<sup>45</sup>, the incidence of such forms that involve advance and bondage seem to be prevalent in non-farm informal sectors. Labourers are mobilised through intermediaries, variously known as *mestris*, *mukhadams*, labourcontractors, extending cash advances to migrant workers to construction work, brick-kilns, sugarcane cutting etc (Breman,1994; 1996; Olsen and Murthi, 2000 Guerin, 2009; Guerin et al, 2009; Picherit, 2009; discussed in Chapter-7). Not only employers ‘bind’ labourers through advance payments/debts but ‘delayed payment’ and other means are employed to ensure a continuous supply of cheap labour that Breman terms as ‘neo-bondage’ in these informal sectors.

Similarly, Kapadia (1999, 2000) in her study among the female workers of a rural synthetic gem-cutting industry in Tamil Nadu points to the ‘modernity of bonded labour’. She argues that the “system of debt bondage enables employers to convert wages into debt, with the consequence that workers are represented as repaying their debts through their work, rather than earning wages”.

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<sup>45</sup> See Jhodka, 1994;1997;2012; Harrisset *al*, 2010

De Neve's study (1999; 2005) on the relations between factory owners and wage labourers in a power loom industry in Tamil Nadu also shows that the practice of giving advances to labourers in an attempt to bind them through debt. This has been newly introduced within the 'capitalist, industrial and urban setting'. He argues that "the origins of this practice lie in the employers' attempts to attract, retain and discipline labour within a competitive market". But, he shows how the practice of advancing debts has become problematic for employers, when they are faced with resistance from the indebted workers. Factory owners' attempt to impose their power is not left unchallenged, but resisted by labourers by their repeated attempts to escape. "Their quiet resistance, though not fully successful, is nevertheless effective in preventing the unrestrained imposition of power". However, having escaped from one employer, "the workers cannot but enter the new bonds of debt and dependency with another employer". Thus, deNeve concludes, "[p]ower loom workers appear successful in escaping individual employers whom they do not like, yet failed to escape structures of subordination that keep them tied to the employers as a group". These studies also show that incidence of elements of 'mutuality', 'reciprocity', 'patronage', as ways of legitimising dominance and as effective means of controlling labourers (Lerche, 1995; deNeve, 2005).

### **1.3. Objective of the study**

One could draw that studies so far have focused on various aspects of agrarian change in general and also on the conditions of labourers in particular. However, one finds that there is a deficiency of research on the impact of labour out-migration and the non-farm incomes on the rural household and village economy and further, on the social relations in the villages. Studies have indicated how 'crucial' migrant incomes have become on the rural households in recent times. But beyond such incomes, there is very less that is known on the economic mobility of rural households.

More importantly, studies that focused on the 'departing end' of migrant households i.e. villages, usually considered rural migrant labour as 'unskilled' labourers contributing migrant incomes. There is little that is known on the individuals with varying education levels and resources that acquire skills within casual wage work that may have significant differential impact on household economy and mobility. There is a lacuna in the understanding on the long term

experiences of migration and migrant work and how such experience shapes the changing choices of work and access to such work. As the studies usually adopt survey method and focus on household economic diversification and incomes, the focus is very less on the changing social relations within villages. Only a few exceptions are found focusing on the qualitative aspects of village life involving systematic study in recent times (for example Harriss et al, 2010; Jhodka, 2012). Even such studies hardly paid sufficient attention to the detail of the nature of work that men and women involve away from the village, inter-generational changes in such work and the possible variations between caste and age groups and its varying impact on households. On the other hand, studies that focused on migrant workers in the urban centres or informal sectors did not connect the meanings and importance of such work in the context of home villages. This lacuna was also already pointed by scholars (Breman et al, 1997).

Another deficiency one finds in the literature that has not been captured yet is the nature of employer labourer relations in the context of increasing fragmentation of land. Literature suggests increasing pressure on land and predominance of small and marginal farms but how labour is organised in agriculture is not sufficiently understood. Rural labour relations were largely analysed in terms of binary categories i.e. employers and labourers. Whether distinct categories of 'agricultural labourers' and 'land owners' still obtain in such a context is another question. How it changed and how it varies across sections of cultivators and how out-migration of labour affects such employment relations in a village setting seems an important dimension in understanding social relations in the village.

This study, therefore, seeks to understand some of these aspects taking village as a unit of analysis while attempting to cover the linkage of village households' economic and social life beyond the village. It is situated in a context of changing land structure and out-migration of labour. It seeks to understand, broadly, the conditions of labour households and the process of labour migration and its impact on the household economy in the village. Further, it attempts to map the change in social relations in the village through an analysis of changing agrarian relations. In such an attempt, this study sets out the following specific objectives:

- 1.To map and understand agrarian transition in historical and regional context; to understand and document the present state of agriculture and the extent of its significance for the livelihoods of village households across different sections.
- 2.To understand the material and social conditions of households and how such conditions influence spatial mobility of individuals/households that live and work away from the village, and explain socioeconomic patterns in the village.
- 3.To understand the role of migrant labour on household and village economy; the possibilities of economic mobility are explored.
- 4 To analyse the impact of labour migration on the nature of economic interactions between castes and households; how the interactions between castes that in the past were distinguished by the degree of the possession or absence of socioeconomic power in the village are continuing or changing. This is analysed through the changing arrangements and exchanges of labour service, the relations between the employers and labourers and, broadly, the changing agrarian structure.

### **Methodology**

This research is based on an intensive study of a village on the lines of anthropological village studies in India. But the fieldwork in this study extended beyond the village following migrating workers. Hence, it also includes some urban slums and work sites.

*Selection of the village:* As the study focuses on social relations in a village setting rather than the conditions of rural labour at large, a village was chosen following certain criteria. To understand the conditions of rural labour the structure of landholdings and caste composition and further, irrigation pattern were chosen as criteria to identify a suitable village that would closely resemble the pattern in the district at large. The following criteria were adopted to identify a village for field study.

- 1) A multi-caste village
- 2) Landowning pattern that closely resembles the district at large
- 3) A village that has both tank and groundwater irrigation as this has been the pattern of irrigation at large in the district
- 4) A moderate size village in terms of population

- 5) A village where the pattern of migration is independent mobility of persons so that I could follow them to their destinations. Further, it was to study this pattern of migration that has been emerging as the predominant pattern

I visited about ten *mandals* in different parts of the district in April and May, 2006, to understand migration as well as cultivation patterns. After deciding a *mandal* in the north-western part of the district, I decided on the village Chennaram (pseudonym) based on the above criteria. This was done after collection of official data on population, landholdings and irrigation. I initiated fieldwork in the village from June 2006 to cover one full agricultural year.

*Fieldwork:* Fieldwork involved collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in the village. At first I stayed in the mandal headquarters renting a room for about two months and visited the village every day during this period to build a rapport and to gain a preliminary understanding of the caste dynamics in the village.

As I belong to a caste that is also part of the village under study, I was open to the possibility of my caste identity influencing the rapport I could gain with different caste groups. Therefore, I decided to visit the village for some time and build a rapport with all caste groups before I could move into the village. Initially I visited mostly the SC households while at the same time meeting with others. After two months, I got a small vacant house of a *reddy* woman without any fixed rent. The owner of the house had moved to her son's house to take care of her grandchildren as her son and daughter-in-law moved to Mumbai for wage work. This is where I stayed and cooked food for myself. The landlady also provided food many a times.

Quantitative data was collected through a census survey covering all the 230 households of the village. Individual- and household-level data was collected through a household schedule. The schedule contained questions on various aspects both at the level of individuals *viz* age, sex, education, occupation, migration status (past and present), etc. At the household level, it consisted of questions of land (wet and dry), source of irrigation, cattle, whether land is cultivated or any part of it left fallow, land bought or sold roughly in the previous 15 years and from/to which caste group households, etc.

Qualitative data was collected through informal and semi-structured interviews with questions varying depending on the occupational/caste status of the individual and household. Observations during work, negotiations of work and wages, life in the village and the slums etc. not only provided useful insights but formed the basis of further questions.

I used a voice recorder during some of the interviews when time was fixed for an informal interview with the consent of the respondents. I collected about 50 such recorded interviews ranging from 20 minutes to more than two hours in some cases. Many times notes were taken after informal conversations with individuals and groups.

The major part of the year between June, 2006 and March, 2007 was spent in the village taking breaks in between. In April 2007, I travelled to Nasik along with a household that formed a detailed case study for this research. I stayed in the same slum as that of my respondents. One vacant *jhopad* (shack) whose owner had returned to the village (neighbouring Chennaram) was offered to me by his kin member. Here I observed living and working conditions, observed negotiations at the labour point, followed labourers to construction sites, and in the evenings I interviewed villagers from Chennaram.

Similarly, I did fieldwork at Ulhasnagar (Thane district, adjacent to Mumbai) in July 2007 staying in a *jhopad* rented in by Tirupati Reddy from Chennaram. I spent 20 days at this slum. Later in March 2008, I spent 15 days in Chennaram and collected information about various members staying in Mumbai. I spent the whole of April 2008 in Mumbai staying most of the time at one slum at Kalva (Thane). Later I stayed with a friend at IIT, Mumbai and visited other slums from there.

This fieldwork enabled me to understand the nuances in the process of circulation of labourers, work options and living conditions in urban slums. Further, as the majority of working age persons of the village live and work in the cities, limiting the site of fieldwork to village alone provides a partial picture of the village.

One of the limitations of the fieldwork has been limited access to observation in the agricultural fields. As agricultural work is gendered and predominantly feminised, visiting fields in absence of men while transplantation or weeding in which women

are employed was found difficult. I visited fields only along with men. Staying for long in the fields in absence of men was not a possibility. To study female agricultural labour on the lines of studies on 'shop floor politics' is hindered in this case because of my gender.

### **Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation is organised into the following chapters. The second chapter provides a historical account of agrarian relations in Telangana. It documents from historical sources and other literature the relations of land and various forms of labour and the conditions of labourers. The third chapter presents a brief profile of the district, and of village based on census survey conducted as part of the field study and other qualitative information. Social composition, literacy and education levels, material conditions and a brief discussion on village politics is presented in the second part of this chapter. Fourth chapter deals with the changing landholding pattern and technological aspects of agriculture in the village situating in the larger regional context. It deals with the risks and disparities in groundwater irrigation and the state of rainfed agriculture.

The fifth chapter deals with the problem of categories in analyzing households' socio economic position with regard to land and labour. It offers classifications both at the level of individuals and households and analyses the predominance of 'classes of labour'. Further, it presents three detailed case studies of households that represent the latter classes. These case studies are descriptive in nature that presents everyday life and struggle of labourers for livelihood and dignity, intra- and inter-generational changes in forms of labour.

The sixth chapter deals with changing aspects related to agricultural labour and dependency relations in the village. It deals with mechanisation, emergence of small farms and household labour. The seventh chapter deals with the phenomenon of circulation of labour, its patterns and the extent of household dependence on migrant incomes. It further deals with the role of migration in household economy and possibilities of economic mobility. The final chapter highlights some important observations of the study and offers some conclusions.

## Chapter-2

### **Agrarian Structure and Conditions of Labour in Telangana: Historical Account**

This chapter provides a brief historical account of the agrarian structure and the conditions of agricultural labour in Telangana region before the merger of the Hyderabad state in Indian Federation in 1948 and the first general elections in 1951. This is done by drawing from literature and other documented historical evidence for the period ranging from the 1920s to the early 1950s. The purpose of this historical account is to document the trajectory of change in agrarian relations. This chapter offers relevant insights in understanding land structure and forms of agricultural labour and other services and the changes in these aspects.

#### **2.1. The State of Hyderabad**

The Hyderabad State was one of the largest princely states in India before independence, and a political structure largely borrowed from Muslim rulers had been preserved till the state merged with the Indian federation in 1948. The Nizam, who ruled from 1912, was the seventh in his lineage and the wealthiest ruler in the world at the time (Dhanagare, 1983).

The state of Hyderabad was some 82,000 square miles. In 1901, its population was 11.1 million and went up to 18.6 million by 1951. There were broadly three linguistic regions in Hyderabad: Telangana comprised nine districts of Telugu-speaking people; Marathwada, had five districts of Marathi-speaking people; and three districts had Kannada-speaking people (ibid). The Telangana had the largest proportion of people, about 47% of the total population (ibid).

##### **2.1.1. Agrarian Structure**

Dhanagare (1983) observes that “the agrarian social structure in Hyderabad was like a page from medieval, feudal history”. Similarly, Sundarayya (1972) points out that “the basic feature that dominated the socio-economic life of the people of Hyderabad and especially in Telangana was the unbridled feudal exploitation that

persisted well-nigh till the beginning of the Telangana armed peasant struggle” in the year 1946.

### 2.1.2. Land Ownership

Out of 22,457 villages in the whole state of Hyderabad, 13,961 villages were under the state government land revenue system. About 60% of total land, i.e. 20 million acres, were called *diwanior khalsa* lands. 6,535 villages (30 percent of the total land) were under the *Jagirdari* system and 1,961 villages (10 percent of the total land) were under *Sarf-e-khas* system (personal lands of the Nizam) (see Report of Agrarian Reforms Committee, 1949; Iyenger, 1951; Sundarayya, 1972).

Table below, from Iyengar (1951)’s “Rural Economic Enquiries in the Hyderabad State, 1949-51”, shows area of the state under different jurisdictions.

Jurisdiction	No. of Villages	Area in Sq.Miles	Percentage of Area to the State Area
<i>Diwani</i> or State Government	13,961	48,969	59.2
Paigahs, Sansthans and <i>Jagirs</i>	6,535	25,620	31.0
Sarf-e-khas or Crown Lands	1,961	8,109	9.8
Total	22,457	82,698	100.0

The Report of the Agrarian Reforms Committee (RARC, 1949) divides the lands of the state into two groups according to their revenue administration.

- i. *Diwani* or *khalsa* lands: Direct management by the government, revenue goes to the treasury.

- ii. Wholly or partially assigned for special purposes.
  - 1. *Sarf-e-Khas* lands
  - 2. *Jagirs*

*Diwani* or *khalsa* lands were broadly like the *Raiyatwari* system. The system of Survey and Settlement of *Raiyatwari* lands and the principles of land revenue administration are laid down in the Hyderabad Land Revenue Act of 1317 F (approx 1907 A D), which was drawn upon the same lines as the Bombay Land Revenue Code V of 1879 (RARC, 1949: 3). Under this system, each field is considered a holding, technically called a “Survey Number”. The landholder is called the “Registered Occupant” or “Pattedar” or “Khatedar”. The right of occupancy depends on the regular payment of assessment by the Pattedar (ibid: 3) Although, the *Raiyatwari* system does not, in principle, have any middlemen between the landholder and the State, the registered occupant need not always be the actual cultivator. Some occupants do give out land based on contract or custom, even in *Raiyatwari* system (RARC, 1949: 4).

The forms in which the land is actually held and worked under the *Raiyatwari* system was classified by RARC (1949) as follows:

1. *Pattadari* or simple occupancy is where the occupant self cultivates or hires labour.
2. *Pot-Pattadari* is one in which two or more cultivators hold a *patta* together. The *pattedar* can neither evict the *pot-pattedar* nor increase the amount payable.
3. *Shikmidari* is where the occupant hands over the land to cultivators on certain terms. These *Shikmidars* cannot be evicted as long as the agreement is upheld.
4. *Asami Shikmis* are tenants - at- will (ibid: 4).

#### *Sarf-e-Khas* Lands

*Sarf-e-Khas* lands were the property of the Nizam. Any revenue from this land went to his privy pursue. Sundarayya (1972: 9-10) describes the *sarf-e-khas* arrangement as one that collected about Rs 20,000,000 annually, all of which was used to meet the expenditure of the Nizam’s family and kin. The Nizam was not

obligated to spend for the betterment of any of the peasants in the area, who were “nothing but bond-slaves, or total serfs”. The peasants in this area had even lesser rights than those in *diwani* areas. Later on, in February 1949, *sarf-e-khas* lands were merged with *Diwani* lands.

### Jagirs

A *Jagir* or *Inam* is a grant of one or more villages as a reward for some service rendered to the State, or for ‘maintaining the status and dignity’ of the recipient. The revenue from these *Jagir/Inam* lands wholly or partially is given to the beneficiary. The *Jagirdar* was also responsible to enforce revenue collection in these areas. Sometimes, *Jagirlands* were also given to more than one person (see RARC, 1949: 2,6).

*Jagirs* comprised 6,535 villages, accounting for 30.9% of the total area of the state. In *jagir* villages, raiyats had the same rights as those in *diwani* lands. *Jagirdars* were seldom known to give out *pattas*; they would lease out land to raiyats for fixed periods, similar to tenants-at-will. Rents would be renewed with fresh agreements; this was the case even for *kowldars* and *laonidars*, and even for long-standing cultivators of the region (RARC, 1949: 8-9).

*Jagirlands* were considered more ‘oppressive’ than even *sarf-e-khaslands* (Dhanagare, 1983:184) The administration in these lands was “far from satisfactory” (RARC, 1949: 9) And the arrangement was such that civil courts had no jurisdiction on *Jagir* lands and left actual cultivators at the mercy of a variety of illegal taxes (Dhanagare, 1983:184). To address these issues, the Land Revenue Act was amended in 1946, to empower the government to introduce compulsory survey and settlement in *jagir* lands as well. This provided all those cultivators under the *jagirdar* the status of *pattedar*, irrespective of whether their names were in the *jagir* records (RARC, 1949: 8-9)

Eventually the *jagirdari* system was abolished once the newly formed India’s Government took over the lands under *jagirs* and the Abolition of *Jagirs* Regulation of 1949 came into force on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1949 (see RARC, 1949: 10).

### 2.1.3 Accumulation of Land

*Deshmukhs* and *deshpandes*, who were tax collectors (with magisterial and judicial powers<sup>46</sup>) in *diwani* areas, and *jagirdars*, who had claims on the revenue from *jagir* lands, illegally acquired large tracts of land, especially, after the introduction of the system of Survey and Settlement that was laid down in the Hyderabad Land Revenue Act of 1317 F (approx. 1907 A D).

Sundarayya (1972:10-11) writes how these landlords had come to own thousands of acres of lands:

The major portion of the lands cultivated by the peasants came to be occupied by the landlords, during the first survey settlement. These people who had power in their hands got lands registered in their names without the knowledge of the peasants who were cultivating them and the peasants came to know of it only afterwards when it was too late to do anything. Thus, these feudal lords got possession of unlimited vast lands and made them their legal possession.

Even lands which were left out in possession of the peasants in the survey settlement were occupied by the landlords in the years of the economic crisis of 1920-22 and 1930-33, when the peasants either due to bad harvests or unfair prices for the crops were unable to pay the taxes...

Balagopal (1983:709) also observes that *deshmukhs* “appear to have been revenue farmers” until the administrative reforms initiated in the 1870s. The reforms included settling land revenue with individuals by giving them the *pattas* on land (ibid). This survey and settlement is believed to have started land grab by *deshmukhs*, and other landlords used “their influence with the officialdom” in Telangana. Further, there was forcible acquisition of land from the peasants citing reasons such as “non-payment of tax, refusal to do vetti, default on loan, or inability to pay the fine imposed by the landlord... or any such alleged ‘misdemeanour’”(ibid: 710).

Acquisition of lands by the non-cultivating classes gave rise to absentee landlordism and tenant farming, in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (RARC, 1949). Land was increasingly becoming like any other commodity. It was bought and sold at prices sometimes far removed from its actual yield capacity. This phenomenon was observed internationally as well (RARC, 1949). Besides the obvious economic value,

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<sup>46</sup> See Thirumali (1992) for a discussion on *deshmukhs* and their rise to power.

there was also prestige and status attached to possession of land. This urge to own land for various reasons led to large tracts being owned by non-cultivators who would then lease it out to those who actually cultivated it (ibid). For these landowners, their land only represented a source of rent and nothing more (see ibid: 12-13).

The extent of the acquisition of lands can be best illustrated by a few examples documented by Sundarayya detailing the extent of landownership of big landlords:

1. Vishnur Deshmukh – 40,000 acres, in Nalgonda district.
2. Suryapet Deshmukh- 20,000 acres.
3. Babasahebpet Deshmukh – 10,000 acres, Miryalgudataluka.
4. Kalluru Deshmukh– 100,000 acres, Madhirataluka, Khammam district.
5. Jannareddy Pratap Reddy – 150,000 acres, Suryapet taluka (see Sundarayya, 1972).

Another study, “Economic Investigations in the Hyderabad State, 1929-30” by Iyengar (1931) shows that in the 12 villages studied in Warrangal district “1.7 percent of the occupants hold more than 35 percent of the total area. In wetland the distribution is worse...2.5 percent of the occupants hold more than 50 percent of the total wet area” (ibid:4).The administrative report of 1950-51 gave figures to show that in the three districts of Nalgonda, Mahbubnagar and Warangal, the number of *pattedars* who owned more than 500 acres were about 550, who together owned 60% to 70% of the total cultivable land (cited in Sundarayya, 1972).These studies more or less indicate that land concentration was extreme in the Hyderabad State even at the time of Indian Independence.

S.C. Dube’s study (1955: 72-74) in the village of Shamirpet in Hyderabad district analyses the pattern of land ownership in the village. A quarter of the land in Shamirpet village is owned by one family, which owns 800 acres. Eight families with about 100 acres each together own another one-fourth of land. 20 families with 40 acres each own another one-fourth. 160 families, with about 5 acres each, own the rest of the land. 110 families were left nearly landless.

To conclude, the process of land accumulation, as has been argued, largely involved landgrab by landlords mostly from the 1870s till about the 1940s and mainly during the periodic survey settlements (Balagopal, 1983).

## 2.2 Tenancy

With this large-scale acquisition and concentration of lands by a few landlords (*Deshmukhs, Jagirdars* and others) absentee landlordism and tenant farming grew in the State of Hyderabad. Hereditary cultivators had become tenants on their own lands. Official enquiries in the later part of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like The Tenancy Committee (1940), Agrarian Reforms Committee (1949), Economic Investigations (1929-30), Rural Economic Inquiries (1949-50), etc. were preoccupied with the problem of tenant farmers who emerged as a large category.

This development under the *Rayatwari* system of tenure was noticed by the Famine Commission of 1879 (cited in RARC, 1949: 11-12). They observed that, "...a considerable class of subordinate tenants is growing up, who have no permanent interest in the land, and who pay such high rents that they must always be in a state of poverty. These subordinates are not recorded or recognized in the Government Registrar, but the existence of such a class involves the same evils as we have dwelt on the case of tenants in upper India". The commission was of the view that such subordinate tenants should also be recognized by the local governments and all transaction of rent and area under cultivation must be recorded.

Between 1901 and 1911 there was an extraordinary increase in the number of rent receivers (1748%) and a relatively very small increase in the number of ordinary cultivators. The figures further show a large increase of 172% in the number of farm servants and field labourers. Assuming the accuracy of the census figures (cited in RARC, 1949), it clearly shows that land went out of the hands of the cultivators into those of rent receivers during the decade 1901-1911 at a rapid rate or that cultivators were giving up cultivation and were becoming mere rent receivers. According to 1931 Census Report (conducted by the Nizam) the total number of rent receivers (earners and working dependents) was 4,40,693 as against 10, 55, 832 cultivating owners and 5,01,894 tenant cultivators. If we take land owners as a whole, cultivating and non-cultivating, their number comes to 14, 96, 525 and the tenant cultivators constitute about 33% of this number (see RARC 1949: 30-31)

S.M. Bharucha (1937:30), in his enquiries in 312 villages on 'Agricultural Indebtedness' calculated that out of 18 lakhs of *pattedars* and owners of land in the

dominions about 6 lakhs or one third are non-cultivating owners. He also points out that “the number of tenants-at-will or *kowldars* in the 312 selected villages was found to be 16,941, the total number in the Dominions being five and three-fourth lakhs... These men have little or no land of their land” (ibid: 4-5). Further, he observes that “owing to the increase in population on the one hand and increasing transfers of the land to non-agriculturists on the other, the number of agriculturists having little or no land of their own works out to nearly one-third of the number of *pattedars*” (ibid: 5).

### 2.2.1 The Condition of Tenants

In Hyderabad, the Report of the Agrarian Reforms Committee 1949 identifies three kinds of rent payable by tenants.

1. *Batai* or crop-share
2. Money rent
3. Fixed grain rent

Under *batai* or crop-sharing system, a fixed share of the yield of the crop to be raised is fixed before hand as the rent payable, while under the fixed grain rent system, popularly called “gallamagta”, a definite quantity of a particular grain is stipulated as rent, without any reference to the yield. A fixed caast rent is charged in the second form of tenancy (see RARC, 1949: 21).

Tenants had little or no land of their own (Bharucha, 1937). It was found in the 1929-30 enquiry by Iyengar (1931) that the percentage of landless to the total number of tenants was 31.5%. Whereas, the same was found to be 46.6% in 1949-51 enquiry (Iyengar, 1951). These figures show that there was an increase in the number of landless tenants.

Apart from bearing the assessment of land, they used to pay the rent to their landlords that was double the assessment or more, if paid in cash, or on the basis of sharing produce (Bharucha, 1937: 5). “The *kowldars* or tenants are almost in debt, but to a lesser extent than the *pattedars*, as *sowcars* do not advance loans to them as freely as they lend to the owners of land. Their debt is of course unsecured as they have no land of their own in most cases” (ibid).

The tenants used to prefer cash-rents in boom periods and rent in kind when there was a drop in prices of agricultural produce (Iyengar, 1957). Whereas, landlords

used to prefer the other way in receiving rents. But always landlords prevailed. Iyengar's enquiries of 1929-30 and 1949-1951 show that cash rents were on the decrease because of the rise in agricultural prices (ibid: 58).

The problem of tenancy had become complicated. About one third of the agricultural land had gone out of the possession of the 'owners' to moneylenders and *sahukars* in *Diwani* areas; hereditary cultivators were considered tenants-at-will in *Jagir* areas; the *kowldars* or tenants were almost all indebted; tenants had to pay high rents to landlords; and landlords never allowed the same tenants to continue for longer duration apprehensive that the latter may claim rights on the land.

In such a situation, the Revenue Department requested the Government to appoint a committee to investigate into the conditions of tenants and suggest measures for their relief and protection (see RARC, 1949: 21-22). The Tenancy Committee, under the Chairmanship of S.M.Bharucha appointed by the Nizam's Government, came to the definite conclusion as follows:

...if early steps for giving adequate relief to this class (tenants) are not taken no improvements in land can be effected, rack-renting will not be stopped as pressure on land grows every year and the condition of the tenantry will further deteriorate...in order, therefore...to improve the condition (of the tenancy) who bear a proportion of nearly 40% of the number of cultivating owners,...tenancy legislation should be introduced in Hyderabad without delay...(cited in the RARC,1949:26-27).

The Government of Hyderabad having accepted all recommendations of the Tenancy Committee, enacted the Hyderabad Asami Shikmis Act in 1354 F (approx. 1944 A D), adopting the draft bill presented by the Tenancy Committee (ibid).

The salient feature, among others, in the Hyderabad Asami Shikmis Act is that the protected *Asami Shikmi* (a tenant who has held the land continuously for a period of not less than six years) cannot be evicted so long as they pay the lawful rent and do not cause any permanent injury to the land or sub-let it to others (ibid).

However, after the Tenancy Committee began investigating tenancy problems, landlords tended to evict longstanding tenants, fearing that they would lay claim on the land under their control. This continued even after the Asami Shikmis Act came into force, largely because tenants were ignorant of the law (ibid).

### 2.3 Agricultural Labourers

The population of the category of 'Farm Servants and Field Labourers' according to the Census Report of 1901 was 10,23,643. It was 27,88,212 according to the Census Report of 1911 and 17,63,562 according to the 1921 Census Report. As mentioned earlier, an analysis of growth of population of any occupational category is rendered difficult by the frequent changes in the classification and enumeration of occupational heads across various census reports. But, with all such limitations of census data, there was a rise in the number of Farm Servants and Field Labourers. This category grew by 172% between 1901 and 1911 (RARC, 1949). For the same category, between 1901 and 1921, the growth was 58%. Their proportion relative to Rent Receivers, Cultivators also increased. Farm Servants and Field Labourers were 23.07% in 1901, 36.75% in 1911, and 28.75% in 1921. In 1931 again, the population of this category grew and was 38% (Barucha, 1937).

Similarly, with regard to the percentage of the landless agricultural labour families to the total resident families, it was found to be 30% in economic investigations in 1929-30 (Iyengar, 1931) and 33% by SM Bharucha in 1937. Barry Pavier, however, observed that "at no time did poor peasants and agricultural labourers constituted less than 60% of the rural population. This figure can not be definitely verified from official statistics because of the categories that they used but it can be shown to be generally accurate" (Pavier, 1981: 14). But, in spite of a variation of around one percent to five percent, all these reports said that about 30-35% of the total occupational categories were agricultural labourers.

It is significant to point out here that this category of agricultural labourers, although very large, had not received considerable attention even in the 1950s. Most of the preoccupation of the studies and reports was the problem of tenancy, land alienation, indebtedness, etc. For instance, the post-independence government, to tackle "the problem of promoting prosperity and contentment among the agricultural classes in the State and of improving the agricultural economy", appointed the Agrarian Reforms Committee in 1949. The Committee was asked to "investigate and recommend measures to be taken to promote agricultural production and secure peace, contentment and security of tenure among the peasantry". But, neither in the

terms of reference of the committee nor in the report, did the problems of agricultural labourers figure.

Similarly, Iyengar (1951: 354) notes that “the recent Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1950 proposes to afford facilities only to the second category (tenants)” and “leaves out of accounting...landless cultivating labourers, just for the reason that they have not been able secure lands either by inheritance or tenancy contracts”. Further, he observes, that the landless cultivating labourers are the ones that clearly require more immediate attention than the landless tenants (ibid).

### **2.3.1 Conditions of Agricultural Labourers**

There was no study found specifically on agricultural labourers, of course with the exception of Iyengar’s reports (1931; 1951). Other studies only make some references to agricultural labourers, including that of S.C.Dube 1951-52. On the other hand, the studies on Telangana peasants struggle, especially that of Sundarayya (1972), talk about the conditions of labourers to a considerable extent.

Broadly, three forms of labour employment were prevalent in the State of Hyderabad. They were:

1. *Yetti* system (also known as *Yatti*, *Vetti*, *Vattipani*) – ‘forced’ labour paid nominally or unpaid.
2. *Jeethagadu* system (also known as *Bhagela*) – ‘attached’ labour ranging from a year to more than one generation, mostly indebted perennially.
3. *Coolie* system – daily wage labourers.

### **2.3.2 *Yetti* system**

The distinctive feature of those engaged in *yettiis* is that these households, usually from service castes, are recipients of “*inam*” lands. These *inam* lands are given to “facilitate” village services. Those who receive these *inam* lands are expected to provide services to the village officials and others in administrative positions who visit.

Dhanagare observes that “it seems that the *vetti* and *bhagela* arrangements were perversions of the traditional Hindu *jajmani* system which was based on the principle of reciprocal exchanges. Its Telangana variant was highly exploitative, being based on the economic power wielded by those *jajmans*, like the *durras* (jagirdars and *deshmukhs*), who owned land” (Dhanagare, 1983: 185). Similarly, Iyengar also observes that, “this forced labour not paid for known as *vattipani*... involves worse terms than English manorial system at its worst. Rather, it comprises (as is practiced today) livery obligations without maintenance responsibility” (Iyengar, 1931: 43).

This “phase of serfdom” –*yattipani*, “free compulsory service” according to Iyengar’s 1929-30 enquiries was of two kinds. In almost every village in Warangal district there were *yeti madigas* who could not object to their terms of work. Iyengar compared their terms to those prevalent among the *mahars* of Marathwada, where they would receive a portion of the harvest for each plough they worked. Iyengar notes two varieties of *yatti*. One in which a ‘nominal’ payment is made and another without any payment.

In a few cases some *yatti* families are specially maintained by big landholders (as at Ghanapur)... Even here, the concerned families get some return though not much more than nominal. But the other variety of *yatti* exercise at Kondur is a general levy on all the smaller villagers-occupants, tenants, and labourers as such. No payment is made, no notice is given and there is no limit to the amount of work that might be extracted. The ostensible justification in such cases appears to be that the ancestors of the concerned Raja enjoyed this privilege on the ancestors of the families oppressed at present. (Iyengar, 1931: 14)

As mentioned earlier, it was not only agricultural field labourers but also various backward communities and service castes that were forced to do *yetti*, ranging from household works to carrying landlords family members in *pallakis* (carriers) on their shoulders. Sundarayya (1972) describes various forced works prevalent in general during the Telangana uprising.

...in Telangana *Vetti* system was an all- pervasive social phenomena affecting all classes of people, in varying degrees. Each Harijan families had to send one man from the family to do *vetti*... Their daily job consisted of household works in the house of the *patel*, *patwari*, *mali-patel* or *deshmukh*, to carry reports to police station, taluk office (tehsils); keep watch on the village *chavadi* and the poundage. Besides these, there used to be more work for them whenever an officer came to the village *chavadi*. (ibid: 12)

Sundarayya goes on to describe how various occupational castes would provide unpaid services and materials to landlords and officials of the village. Cobblers, weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, barbers and even shepherds were made to provide services and products without pay. They were always on call, including the 'peasants and 'agricultural labourers', "without any remuneration" (ibid:14). However, he notes that other peasants used to pay these artisans and service castes "fixed amounts in grain and other agricultural produce" (ibid: 2-13). The latter corresponds to *jajmani* relations.

One of the worst cases of yetti, landlordism and feudal exactions, which most literature on the Telangana struggle mention was the case of the 'notorious' landlord Vishnur Rama Chandra Reddy. Sundarayya notes that it was against this landlord the 'armed struggle' in the region had begun:

Vishnur Rama Chandra Reddy the notorious desh mukh in Jangaon Tehsil of Nalgonda district, used to forcibly cease the lands from the tenants and the peasants. He used to force the peasants in his area, of about 40 villages, to do forced labour in his fields, all thorough the year; ...It was against such forced labour and legal exactions and evictions that the Andhra Mahasabha, the cultural organization of the Telugu - speaking Andhra people of the Telangana region of Hyderabad State waged innumerable struggles. The beginnings of Telangana armed struggle were against the atrocities of this very same Vishnur Deshmukh in 1946, when his goondas attacked and murdered Doddi Komarayya the local Andhra Mahasabha worker in Kadivedi village on July 4<sup>th</sup> (ibid: 16).

The situation seems to have either slightly changed by 1950, or was approached differently by Dube in the village of Shamirpet in the year 1951-52, where he presents a slightly better picture than that of Sundarayya's descriptions during the Telangana struggle (1946-51) and Iyengar's Economic Investigation(1929-30). This may be due to the influence of democratic movements and communist ideas. It may also be because of the village's proximity to Hyderabad city.

With regard to a number of village 'menials' like *kawalkar*, *talari*, *yetti*, *wadla*, *kammari*, *kummari*, *mangali*, *sakali*, etc., Dube (1955) notes that these castes had two functions in the village, one was their routine daily duties, and the second was their special duties of attending to touring officials who visited the village. They were usually paid nominally for their work. Some were paid monthly, some were granted revenue-free lands, while some would collect what was due to them during

the harvest season. Dube uses the term *yetti* for village menial work done by *sakalis* and *madigas*. He writes, “the *Yettis* in Shamirpet are from *Sakali* and *Madiga* castes. The *Sakali Yettis* do most of the superior work,..., while the *Madiga Yettis* have to do all sorts of odd jobs of an inferior nature... The *Yettis* are not paid any salary for their work, and the nominal payments made by touring officials bear no proportion to the work done by them” (ibid: 52).

### **2.3.3 Jeethagadu or Bhagela System**

Iyengar in the *Economic Investigations of 1929-30* identifies the main features of the *Bhagela* System (*Jeethagadu* in Telugu). They are:

1. Payment of remuneration annually in kind. If paid monthly, calculation is at a lower rate. In some cases food is given;
2. Service is full-time and includes all sorts of work;
3. Changing masters was considered immoral, and the master of an absconding *bhagela* would, almost as a legal right, compel him to return to service;
4. The *bhagela* usually always had some debt to repay to the master. However, no interest was charged on the debt;
5. Most debt of *bhagelas* was due to marriage expenses. In the northern and central villages, it was understood that if the children of a *bhagela* were married off with the support of a particular master, then these children would also work under the same master;
6. Upon death, the debt was waived;
7. The grain or food, given as remuneration, was less than the minimum required for the physical needs of these workers who did hard labour. In places like Kondur, the bonus of two months' remuneration, tobacco etc., appear to be rather exceptional, and do not prevail in every village;
8. The master is looked upon as having the right to punish, starve or confine the *bhagela* for any offence of omission or commission;
9. There is no written agreement of any sort between the master and *bhagela*;
10. The *Bhagela* system has been in existence for a long time.

Iyengar observes that this serfdom was a feature of Warangal villages, where landless and tenancy-less farmers, and younger members of households attached

themselves to landlords as *bhagelas*. Similarly, Bharucha (1937) also makes similar observations about *bhagelas*, noting that they were permanent servants to cultivators, and were sometimes hereditary servants mainly due to marriage debt. The cultivator/master used to feed and clothe *bhagelas* and take service in lieu of interest. He also remarks that “these depressed classes and farm labourers are living in chronic penury and indebtedness” (ibid: 6).

Some of the *bhagelas* were tied down to the landholder families hereditarily owing huge debts. Interest was not charged on the debt advanced to the *bhagelas* as long as they stay attached to the landholder’s family. But if a *bhagela* wanted to leave his master, then he was forced to repay the debt along with the interest. Thus, *bhagelas* were tied down to their masters for many years without being able to come out of the debt trap.

In Gudur, one of the villages studied by Iyengar, out of the 227 households about 123 families were landless and tenancyless. There were 146 *bhagelas*, out of whom 59 were heads of family. They were largely under monopoly control of the landlords there. Almost all owed debt to their landlord masters, and those who didn’t own any debt would soon be indebted usually because of marriage. To repay debt and leave the service of the landlord was near impossible. “The convention is that if *bhagela* wants to leave the service of his master he should pay back the debt due from him together with interest on that sum from the time it was borrowed. This amount would be practically prohibitive. Here also, the practice obtains the children born of marriages financed (by debt) by masters, should automatically become *bhagelas* of the respective masters” (Iyengar, 1931:265).

Iyengar’s study shows that there were several *bhagelas* who were with their masters for as long as 30-40 years and in some cases across generations. Iyengar also observes that the terms of *bhagelas* in the service of large landlords were worse than those attached to middle peasants or tenants. With regard to attached *madigas*, Dube (1955) observes that their masters were ruthless and inconsiderate, which compelled *bhagelasto* obey without protest. Those who were under masters who were considerate would consider themselves lucky. It was in general not advisable to disobey their masters, as it would mean being banished from the village. Similarly, in Adilabad taluka (northern taluka of Telangana), Sundarayya writes about the

inadequate food available to these attached labourers and their perpetual debt-bound servitude. Families were half-starved and many a times forced to continue borrowing from their landlords.

Because of such severe conditions of service, *theyetti* and *bhagela* systems were considered two phases of serfdom that are symptoms of a “very backward rural economy” (Iyengar, 1931). In 1936, the government had passed a stringent Bhagela Regulation. It abolished by law the practice of advancing money and taking services endlessly in lieu of interest. It was replaced by voluntary annual contracts (Bharucha, 1937).

### **2.3.4 The Coolie System**

The *coolies* are mostly the daily wage labourers having freedom to contract and move for work, though according to Iyengar (1931), this freedom was “little exercised by them”. These labourers are mainly from the “depressed classes” (Bharucha, 1937: 5). “They live on outskirts of villages in insanitary surroundings, do Government and private village-work, carry messages and most of the transplanting, weeding, grass cutting and harvesting in the Dominions” (ibid:5-6). In busy season even ordinary cultivators had to employ casual labour (Dube, 1955). These casual labourers, however, had obligations to work first for the large cultivators or landlords before taking up the works of middle peasants or for their own work. Ramachandra Reddy (1984: 9) writes, “the agricultural labour and small peasants could work for themselves only after completing the operations on landlords fields. Women workers who toiled hard from morning to evening in agricultural operation were not allowed to go home in the afternoon to feed their babies as that meant a loss of an hour or so; instead they had to take out the milk in small bowls made of leaf that was carried by old women who fed the babies”.

These labourers in the dominions were mostly paid in kind, i.e. grain (Bharucha, 1937). Even, Iyengar (1931: 13) notes that, “except in the south west wages are paid in kind”. “[T]he wages-level is low between 2 and 3 measures of grain per day per adult male labourer and 1.5 and 2 measures per day for women coolies” (ibid). Bharucha’s (1937: 6) reports that “agricultural labourers are satisfied tiwh this system”. However, he adds that “wages have decreased since 1337 Fasli [approx.

1927 AD] by 30-40 percent according to decline in prices”. The reduction in wage rates compared to 1929-30 (Iyengar, 1931) to 1936-37 (Barucha, 1937) was attributed to the effects of the depression (Iyengar, 1951: 210).

It is to be noted here that during the Telangana struggle in the villages where the movement was strong, agricultural wage rates are reported to have increased. Sundarayya (1974: 125) notes agricultural labourers “sometimes through strikes and demonstrations for increase in their yearly and daily wages, and by bringing pressure on the peasants through their representatives in the village committees, succeeded to a great extent in their demands. The daily wages were increased from 2 to 3 kilos of grain to 4 kilos and the monthly grain salary of farm servants from 40 to 60 kilos to 80 to 90 kilos and in certain cases, even 120 kilos”. Iyengar (1951) based on his investigations found that the wage rates have increased. He observes, “there is no doubt that the wage level has risen substantially” (ibid: 211). However, he adds wages did not keep pace with living expenditure. Thus, it led to both a deterioration of the standard of living and also increased the tendency to borrow for consumption expenditure (ibid: 218-19).

## **2.4 Summary**

Telangana’s agrarian structure and land ownership patterns were a result of landlords from specific castes that sought power and favour from the Nizam’s government, and acquired various official and administrative positions. The various forms of State control of lands, *diwani*, *jagirdari* and *sarf-e-khas*, needed to be governed, and landlords from castes like *reddys*, *velamas* and *brahmins* were given State sanction to maintain land records, to collect revenue and maintain law and order. These functionaries were later even conferred with magisterial and judicial powers. Studies of the period establish that such forms of administration led to bred their own methods of accumulation of land, extraction of rent and work from the peasantry.

The peasants on *sarf-e-khas* lands were under the thumb of the Nizam and were working for nearly no pay, while those under a *jagirdar* were worse- or better-off depending on the *jagirdar* they were under. Essentially, local power structures crippled the peasantry in various ways. Power allowed the local officialdom to find ways to extract disproportionate rent or coerce the landless and land-poor tenants and agricultural labour households, who were indebted, to work endlessly in service of the

debt. Tenants would cultivate land on disadvantageous terms, as large tracts of land would be under a few landlords who exercised monopoly control over land. The Nizam government's attempts to address these issues were in vain, as with every survey and settlement, more land was taken over by the *landlords*, who either occupied official positions or were well connected. Land concentration only became starker over the years running up to 1948.

The emphasis of this brief history was to broadly understand the agrarian relations prevalent in Telangana, and to see the various ways in which agricultural labour households were coerced to work for meager wages for long periods of time, sometimes generations. The *yetti* system was in principle a way to facilitate castes that provided services to village residents. Those under this system were granted *inam* lands and were expected to provide services to the village officials and visiting administrative officials. This system was, however, subverted and perverted by local landlords to suit their own ends. It is these perversions that attracted a lot of attention from those studying Telangana during that period. *Yetti* has come to become a sort of generic term for all forced-labour practices, and even scholars have overlooked or de-emphasised its particular characteristics, and have likened it to the *jajmani* system (discussed in Chapter 6).

The *bhagelas* system was another system of labour control that was essentially based on debt, and unlike the *yetti* system, was between the labourer and a particular family. There were identical systems practiced in other regions of India as well. In Tamil Nadu they were known as *pannaiyals* (Kumar, 1965) while they were called *kamias* in Bihar, Orissa and parts of Bengal (Pouchepadass, 2009). In fact the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act of 1976 has a list of debt-bondage practices that were practiced across India.

Lastly, the *coolie* system comprised those labourers who could enter into work agreements with some "freedom" to choose employer, and were mainly from "depressed" classes and castes. These workers were also paid meager wages and toiled long hours and would most likely be from castes (like *madiga*) that lived on the outskirts of the village. With this broad background and understanding of agrarian labour relations, the next chapter describes the field village, Chennaram in Mahbubnagar district of Telangana.

## Chapter-3

### Profile of Chennaram village

#### 3.1 Mahbubnagar District

The village chosen for the study is given a pseudonym, Chennaram. It is located in Mahbubnagar district. Mahbubnagar is one of the ten districts of the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh state, and part of the semi-arid, agro-climatic region of south Telangana. The district acquired its name from Mahbubnagar, the headquarter town, which was named after Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, the Nizam of Hyderabad (Govt.of AP, 2004). The district and the town of Mahbubnagar are also known as Palamur, a name of the town which is still widely used (unofficially). The labourers of the district, known for migrating on a large scale and working at construction sites in many parts of the country, are also popularly known as 'Palamur labour'. The district is divided into five Revenue Divisions, 64 mandals comprising 1,550 Revenue Villages and 1,351 Gram Panchayats, and 7 towns (four Statutory and three Non-statutory towns).

##### 3.1.1 Demographic features

The district had a population of 35,13,934 as per Census 2001<sup>47</sup>. Compared with 1951 Census, there was an increase of population by 143 in the next fifty years. The decennial growth rate of population for the district is 14.20% as against 14.59% for the state according to Census 2001. (The provisional population figure for the district, from the latest Census (2011) shows that the total population in the district increased to 40,42,191, with a 15.03% decadal growth rate over 2001). The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes populations account for 17.10% and 7.93% of the total population of the district, which are slightly higher than the State average of 16.19% and 6.59% respectively. The sex ratio (total population) and the child sex ratio (age group of 0-6 years) for the district is 972 and 952 respectively, while the corresponding figures for the state are 978 and 961. The population density in the district is 191 persons per sq.km as against the state average of 277. The literacy rate

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<sup>47</sup>Sources: Census of India 2001, *Andhra Pradesh, A Profile of the State*; Census of India 2001, *Andhra Pradesh, A Profile of the District Mahbubnagar*; *Glimpses of the District Mahaboobnagar, 2004*; Census of India, 2011, *Provisional Population Totals, Andhra Pradesh*, Directorate of Census Operations, AP.

in the district is 44.41% (males – 56.63% and females – 31.89%) as against 60.47% (males – 70.32% and females – 50.43%) of the state. It is the lowest among all districts of the state, while the highest for a rural district being 73.53% for West Godavari (excluding the district of Hyderabad). The latest Census' provisional literacy rates shows that although it still remained lowest for both genders in the state, it has increased to 56.03% – 66.27% for males and 45.65% for females.

### **3.1.2 Geographic and climatic features**

To the north of Mahabubnagar lie Ranga Reddy and Nalgonda districts, to the east lie Nalgonda and Guntur districts, rivers Krishana and Tungabhadra lie to the south and Raichur and Gulbarga districts of Karnataka are to the west<sup>48</sup>. There are hill ranges and forests in the south-eastern part of the district. Rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra flow through the southern part of the district. The Krishna enters the state of Andhra Pradesh in this district and flow through thirteen mandals in the south of the district. The Tungabhadra touches four mandals in the extreme south of the district before joining the river Krishna. Dindi river, a tributary of Krishna flows through the eastern part of the district and joins the river where the borders of the districts of Nalgonda and Guntur join with this district.

The predominant type of soil is red earth, comprising *chalka* (sandy loams), *dubba* (loamy sands), which is about 70% of the total area. *Chalka* and *dubba* are brown to red in colour, possess low water holding capacity, and are not considered to be very fertile. Black soils occur alongside the banks of rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra and other streams. The district is drought prone. The rainfall in the district is scanty with a normal yearly rainfall of 604 mm as against the state average of 940 mm.

### **3.1.3 Agriculture**

Agriculture is predominantly rainfed. The main crops grown, in the descending order of the cultivated area (in the year 2002-03), are jowar, castor, paddy, groundnut, maize, redgram, greengram, cotton, sunflower, bajra, chillies, bengal gram. Dry crops constitute a major part of the cropped area, as the irrigation in the

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<sup>48</sup> Sources: Glimpses of the District, Mahabubnagar, 2004; Census of India, Series 2, Part XII-A&B, District Census Hand Book, Mahabubnagar.

district is meagre. The gross area irrigated as a percentage of the gross cropped area is 21.9%. This means 78.1% of the cropped area is under rainfed cultivation, which is very vulnerable to the uncertainties of rainfall. About 90% of the total irrigated area is dependent on sources like tanks, dug wells and tube wells, which unlike canal irrigation are dependent on rainfall.<sup>49</sup>

Recently, the government of Andhra Pradesh has sanctioned three irrigation projects (two of them were initiated by the previous (Telugu Desam Party) government), but with no progress. The projects proposed to irrigate a total *ayacut* of about 5.78 lakh acres<sup>50</sup>. Mahatma Gandhi (known earlier as Kalwakurthy) Lift Irrigation Scheme is proposed to provide irrigation to 3.40 lakh acres and drinking water to 303 villages in 18 mandals of Kollapur, Nagarkurnool, Achampet, Jadcherla and Kalwakurthy constituencies in Mahbubnagar. The government accorded revised administrative sanction to this project in the year 2005, which is to be completed within a period of 52 months.

Another project, Jawahar (previously known as Nettempadu) Lift Irrigation Scheme, is proposed to irrigate an *ayacut* of about two lakh acres and provide drinking water to 148 villages in eight mandals of Gadwal and Alampur constituencies. This scheme, which was accorded revised administrative approval in the year 2005 as well, and was included in the priority list of 26 state projects to be completed in three years.

The third one, Koil Sagar Lift Irrigation Scheme, is a project to stabilise and increase the *ayacut* of a medium irrigation project, Koil Sagar, constructed in the year 1955. This old Koil Sagar Project was to irrigate 12,000 acres, but for several years only 4,500 acres was being irrigated. The new Lift Irrigation Project is aimed at stabilising the total *ayacut* of 12,000 acres under the old project and also to irrigate a new *ayacut* of 38,250 acres covering a total of 72 villages in 6 mandals of Amarchintha and Makthal constituencies. This scheme was accorded a revised

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<sup>49</sup>The change in the shares of irrigation by various sources from 1950s is provided in Table 4.5 in Chapter 4.

<sup>50</sup>Sources: Notes on Lift Irrigation Schemes, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Irrigation and CAD Department, 2006; Brief Note on Mahatma Gandhi (Kalwakurthy) Lift Irrigation Scheme, Mahbubnagar District, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Irrigation and CAD Department, 2006; Brief Note on Koilsagar Lift Irrigation Scheme, Mahbubnagar District, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Irrigation and CAD Department, 2006;.

sanction in the year 2005, and is also included in the Prioritized Projects to be competed in three years. Even if the *ayacutt* target of these new projects is realised it contributes to the irrigation of only about 18.6% of the total area operated in the district.

### **3.1.4 Landholdings**

There are a total of 7,42,639 operational holdings in the district with a total area of 12,40,751 hectares operated. About 48% of the holdings are marginal category (0-1 hectare) holdings and 26% of the holdings are small category (1-2 hectares) holdings (see Table 3.1). Small- and marginal-size holdings constitute about 74% of the total operational holdings with 37% of the total operated area. Large holdings (10 hectares and above) constitute 1.14% of the total operational holdings with 10.92% of the total operated area. The proportion of the marginal holdings in the district is less than that of the state average (60.90%), while all other categories are more than the state average. The difference could be because of the low density of population associated with a higher per-capita land availability in drought-prone/semi-arid areas (Nadkarni, M.V: 1985) like Mahbubnagar district.

However, the percentage figures of the category-wise holdings of the district closely match with the adjacent districts of Ranga Reddy and Nalgonda. The fragmentation of lands is high even in the adjacent districts because of the proximity of Medak and Ranga Reddy districts to the city of Hyderabad and the emphasis on land reforms by the communists in Nalgonda, where the peasant struggle against the landlords during the Nizam's rule was strong (Sundarayya, 1984).

### **3.1.5 Non-agricultural Industry**

Mahbubnagar is industrially backward with only 360 factories under the organised sector with 8,486 workers and 11,334 employees (see Annual Survey of Industries, 2000-01). The number of "enterprises" in the unorganised sector is 90,649 with 3,72,325 workers. Of which "own-account enterprises" constitute 87.2% with 2,58,893 workers (see Glimpses of the District, 2004). With a population of 35,13,934, with 90% of the "main workers" engaged in agriculture (cultivators and agricultural labourers combined) (Census, 2001), which is uncertain and unproductive and with hardly any non-agricultural employment. Workers including most of those classified

as agricultural labourers migrate to cities and to construction sites of dams and canals not only within the state of Andhra Pradesh but to very long distances.

**Table 3.1:** Class-wise percentages of operational landholdings and area operated in Mahbubnagar district and Andhra Pradesh state (2000-2001).

	Mahbubnagar District	AndhraPradesh State	Mahbubnagar District	AndhraPradesh State
Size Groups	% to Total Holdings	% to Total Holdings	% to Total Area Operated	% to Total Area Operated
Marginal	47.96	60.90	14.53	21.56
Small	26.41	21.84	22.48	24.75
Marginal+Small	74.37	82.74	37.01	46.31
Semi-medium	17.58	12.34	28.12	26.36
Medium	6.89	4.35	23.91	19.83
Large	1.14	0.57	10.92	7.50

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh

### 3.2. ChennaramVillage

Chennaram village is one of the 27 Gram Panchayats and 30 RevenueVillages of Maddur mandal. Maddur mandal is located in the north-western part of the Mahbubnagar district. The village is about 6 kms from mandal headquarters. The distance of the village from the district headquarters town is about 40 kms and from the nearest town, Narayanpet, is 29 kms. The gram panchayat and the revenue unit of Chennaram consists of only one village (settlement) i.e. Chennaram, unlike some of the panchayats and revenue units which comprise more than one settlement<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>51</sup>The mandal of Maddur consists of 86 settelements, including villages, hamlets and *tandas* with only 27 Gram Panchayats and 30 Revenue villages.

The village consists of 230 households with a population of 1,311 (males-631 and females-680) according to the census survey conducted in 2006 for the present study (population of the village based on Census of India, 2001 is 1,282 (males-621 and females-661) with 216 households. Of the total population of the village, SCs and STs constitute 31.73% with 68 households (there is only one ST household in the village), OBCs constitute 42.33% with 97 households and OCs constitute 25.93% (see Table 3.2).

**Table3.2:**Composition of the population of Chennaram village

Category	Households	Males	Females	Total
SC	67	195	216	411
ST	1	3	2	5
BC	97	270	285	555
OC	65	163	177	340
Total	230	631	680	1311

### 3.2.1 Literacy and Education levels

The literacy rate of the village population (excluding the population of 0-5 years of age group) is 46.73%. There is a lot of disparity between male and female literacy rates with nearly 60% among males and 34% among females (see table 3.3). The literacy rates of the village are similar to the district averages. Only 33% of the population above 14 years of age is literate. 85% of the children in the age group of 5 years to 14 years are literate and constitute 48% of the total literates. 76% of the children in the age group of 5 years to 14 years presently go to school, while the remaining 24% have either never been to school or dropped out of school. Around 40% of the SC, ST and OBC and 65% of the OC population is literate. The *golla* (OBC) caste stands at the bottom with a literacy rate of 31% and only 10% of the above 14 years population in this caste group is literate. Although the *golla* caste in

general is better off in material conditions such as land and housing compared to other OBCs, its status is inverse in literacy and education levels because its households prioritised and continued their traditional occupation of rearing sheep by engaging children while adults diversified into cultivation and wage labour.

**Table 3.3:** Literacy rates of Chennaram

Community	Males	Females	Total	5-14years	Above 14years
SC&ST	50.55	32.16	40.89	86.36	22.64
OBC	49.20	29.96	39.48	76.76	16.07
OC	83.97	47.27	65.10	100.00	55.90
Total	58.84	35.26	46.73	84.95	33.03

**Table 3.4:** Education levels of the literate population of Chennaram

Community	1-3	4&5	6&7	8&9	10 disc*	10	10+2	10+2+
SC	44 (31%)	31(22%)	32(22%)	13(9%)	4(3%)	6(4%)	8(6%)	5(3%)
ST	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	68 (32%)	49(23%)	35(16%)	16(8%)	22(10%)	16(8%)	5(2%)	2(1%)
OC	44(21%)	42(20%)	27(13%)	22(11%)	9(4%)	27(13%)	19(9%)	19(9%)
Total	156(27%)	122(21%)	96(17%)	51(9%)	35(6%)	49(9%)	32(6%)	26(5%)

\* disc means discontinued after registering for the class.

Disparity is also reflected in the levels of education among the literate population. As shown in the table 3.4, 27% are literates, including the present school-going children, between first and third standard. Most are dropouts at this level and

cannot read or write. On the whole, nearly 50% of the literates have acquired only below primary-level education. About 15% have reached up to the tenth standard. Most of them have 'failed' or discontinued. About 25% of the population, mostly among OCs and BCs, 'passed' the tenth standard but were forced to discontinue their studies because of poor economic conditions.

Girls among SCs and OBCs stopped going to school after finishing the seventh standard. Only one girl among the SCs is continuing after the seventh standard and was in the ninth standard. Among males, eight reached up to the level of 10+2, but four of them have failed/discontinued. Four reached bachelor's level. Two of them discontinued, one was studying B.Ed (bachelor's degree in education) and one had finished B.Ed. Only one woman among SCs, who married into this village had finished B.Ed. and she is presently a government school teacher.

Among OBCs, four males have reached the level of 10+2 – three of them discontinued while one is presently studying. And, two males among this group finished higher education. One has finished a technical course (polytechnic) and is employed in an automobile company and the other had finished B.Ed. but could not make it in the exam for a teacher's post. He is presently employed as a Village Secretary on contract basis and is also simultaneously pursuing M.Sc (Master's in Sciences) in a university in Maharashtra. Among OCs, 19 reached the level of 10+2. Of whom 11 discontinued, four 'passed' but stopped education and another four are studying. Another 19 have reached the level of bachelor's and master's degree. One discontinued and two finished bachelor's course but without any employment. One has finished B.Com. (commerce) and is employed in a private bank (ICICI); one finished M.Com. and is a chartered accountant; one who finished B.Sc along with Teacher Training Course (TTC) has just got employed as a teacher; and another one has finished B.Tech and was looking for a job.

Altogether, among *reddys* (OC), two are pursuing M.Sc., two B.Ed., eight bachelor's degree and one B.Tech. Although seven men who had finished tenth standard in the 1950s and 1960s, not many got educated later or got employed in the formal sector. Three got employed in the government jobs in the last generation (all of whom have retired), after which no one was employed. Only recently one woman among SCs and one among *reddys* got government teacher jobs.

### 3.2.2. Social Composition

There are thirteen caste groups and one scheduled tribe group in the village (Table 3.5). They are *madiga* (SC), *Bainla* (SC), *yerukala* (ST), *telugu* (OBC), *golla* (OBC), *sakali* (OBC), *vodde* (OBC), *kummari* (OBC), *ediga/goud* (OBC), *pinjari* (OBC), *vodla* (OBC), *jangam* (OBC), *komati* (OC) and *reddy* (OC). *Madiga*, *telugu*, *golla* and *reddy* are numerically the major caste groups which constitute 78% of the total households in the village.

**Table 3.5:** Castes/communities and their traditional occupations

Sl.No.	Caste/Community	HHs	TraditionalOccupation	PresentOccupation*
1	<i>Yerukala</i> (ST)	1	Rearing pigs & basket making	Wage labour
2	<i>Madiga</i> (SC)	52	Leather works & Agricultural Labour	Wage labour
3	<i>Bainla</i> (SC)	15	Perform rituals & Agricultural Labour	Wage labour
4	<i>Telugollu</i> (OBC)	37	Agricultural & Agricultural Labour	Wage labour
5	<i>Sakali</i> (OBC)	17	Washing cloths	Wage labour
6	<i>Golla</i> (OBC)	27	Rearing sheep	Wage labour
7	<i>Vodde</i> (OBC)	3	Breaking stone	Wage labour
8	<i>Kummari</i> (OBC)	2	Pottery	Wage labour
9	<i>Pinjari</i> (OBC)	1	'Molla'	-----
10	<i>Vodla</i> (OBC)	2	Carpentry	Carpentry
11	<i>Jangam</i> (OBC)	1	Priest – perform rituals	Agriculture

12	<i>Goud</i> (OBC)	7	Toddy tapping and selling	Wage labour & Toddy sale
13	<i>Komati</i> (OC)	2	Trade	Trade
14	<i>Reddy</i> (OC)	63	Agriculture & Agricultural Labour	Agriculture & wage labour

\*Present occupation of a caste or a community is that occupation or those occupations the members of that group predominantly engage in.

*Yerukala*: *Yerukala* is a Scheduled Tribe (ST) group. *Yerukala*'s traditional occupation is rearing pigs and also making baskets. There is only one family of *yerukala* tribe in this village. This family still engages in both their traditional occupations. They make baskets for agricultural families, for which they are paid in grain during the harvest of major crops like paddy, red gram and jowar. For five years until the elections for the Gram Panchayat were notified in the year 2006, the head of this family – Ramulu - and his wife worked in Mumbai for wage labour, while their two children stayed in a hostel meant for school-going ST children in the mandal head quarters. As the village Gram Panchayat's *sarpanch* post was reserved for ST, Ramulu was invited to the village to file his nomination for the post. As his family is the lone ST family in the village, with no contender for the post, Ramulu got unanimously elected. Ramulu, being a nominal *sarpanch*, continued his traditional occupations along with his wife. In their absence for five years their relatives from a neighbouring village served the village with baskets. They own half an acre of uncultivable land, which Manyamma (Ramulu's wife) says, was granted by 'Indiramma'<sup>52</sup> (Indira Gandhi).

*Madiga*: *Madiga* is a Scheduled Caste (SC) group. There are 52 households of this caste group in the village. The caste-specific activity of leather works like making whips, sandals and other leather products has almost disappeared in the village. Playing *dappu* (leather drum) on occasions like marriages, funerals, etc., another traditional activity, is on the decline. Very few members of the caste still play the *dappu*. But with reluctance and only for a price that is at least equal to or higher than

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<sup>52</sup>Along with Ramulu, plots of land, supposedly meant for agriculture, and house sites were distributed to SC families when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister. Most of these families claim that they had been supporting the Congress Party for this reason.

the daily wage, persons who know how to play the *dappu* would agree. This activity still seems to continue because of their children's fascination for the *dappu*. On several occasions, during my fieldwork, if there were around five people playing *dappu*, more than half of them would be children. Decline or continuation of traditional activities is discussed later in Chapter-6. Digging the graves for all castes in the village was the job of *madigas* in this region, while *malas* (SC) would do this in the villages where they were present<sup>53</sup>. There are a few instances in the recent past of *madigas* refusing to dig graves for OBCs, which the latter had to do themselves.

In traditional arrangements, each *reddy* family had one or more *madiga* families as their clients to perform certain duties for which they are paid grain during the harvest. Every day the *madiga* woman had to clear dung in the cattle shed, clean the surroundings of the house of the *reddy*, and men were required to dispose of dead cattle, dig graves, etc., apart from agricultural work which was paid for separately. Except one *madigawoman*, whose husband died when her children were very young, no one serves in such an arrangement. However, both the *reddys* and *madigas* still recognize their family clients and patrons respectively, but without any working relation.

In the past *madigas* also did *yetti* (unpaid labour)<sup>54</sup>. There are three families whose surname is *yetti*. It is said that their grandfathers used to serve the *patels* (*police patel* and *mali patel*) and government officials for which they were granted some land, which was called *inam* (reward) land. In the past *madigas*, along with these traditional jobs, were predominantly engaged in agricultural labour. They also had small patches of land. Most of the families, even after so much of fragmentation, still hold a small piece of land under the *ayacut* (which in the recent past is not irrigated due to lack of water) of the village tank. Except a few men in the families which had considerable landholdings, all the men above 35 years to 40 years of age

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<sup>53</sup> Also see Dube, S.C.(1955: p.52)

<sup>54</sup> In the same region (Telangana), S.C. Dube (1955) in his study of Shamirpet village (near the city of Hyderabad) during 1951-52 also mentions such a form of labour performed by *madigas*: "Madiga Yettis have to do all sorts of jobs of an inferior nature. They may be required to patrol the village, to keep watch on government buildings and to sweep and clean the village occasionally...The Yettis are not paid any salary for their work..." (pp.52-3); Iyengar, S.K (1932), based on the study conducted in 12 villages of Warangal District (Telangana region of Hyderabad State) during 1929-30, describes "yatti" or "yattipani" as "serfdom" and as "free compulsory service". He notes, "there are yatti *madigas* in almost every village of the whole district...they get *baluthas* (contribution at harvest time by *riayats* at so much per plough)" (p.14, Vol.III). Also see Sundarayya, P (1972: pp.12-3).

among the *madigas* did *jeethamu* or *gaasamu* (the kind of work scholars on Indian agricultural labour termed ‘attached labour’). Presently, except one young unmarried male who is about 20 years of age, no one among this caste group is employed for *jeethamu*, not even for rearing cattle. A majority of the men and women move to urban centers and mostly engage in manual construction labour. Those who remain in the village during a part or whole of the year engage in agricultural wage – either for piece rate or daily wage– and own agriculture.

*Bainla*: *Bainla* is a Scheduled Caste group. There are 15 households of this caste group in the village. *Bainlas* claim a superior ritual position over *madigas*. They act as priests and perform rites during marriages and other ceremonies for *madigas* as well as within their community.<sup>55</sup> They are the priests for the local deities like *Maisamma* and *Yellamma*. When any family, including *reddys*, perform ceremonies by sacrificing a goat or sheep to the local deities, *bainla* men conduct the rituals for them. They have their own songs and a musical instrument with strings, which they use to perform during ceremonies. They do not have the instrument any more. Only one family has it, but it is not used. However, the *bainlas* do not claim any social superiority over the *madigas* and *vice-versa*. Both considered ‘untouchable’ castes.

The *bainla* and the *madiga* have close social interaction. Their houses are also closely located in the settlement. In recent times, they say, there are also marriages between these two groups. It is also difficult to distinguish between these two groups. Even when asked about the name of their caste the elderly members say they are *harijans* and the younger members say they are SCs<sup>56</sup>. It is to be noted, however, that the previous *sarpanch* of the *Gram Panchayat* (reserved for SC general) elected was a *bainla* and his contender was a *madiga*, both backed by two contending *reddys*. But for the present tenure a *bainla* man who got elected as a ward member, the ward in which SCs were predominant in numbers did not have any SC rival but a *reddy* woman.

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<sup>55</sup> In his study conducted during 1963-65 in Konduru village (in Mahbubnagar district), Hiebert mentions the caste named *baine*. He includes it in the group of *harijan* castes. He also notes that *baine* serve as “priests” to “leather workers” (Hiebert, 1971:26-27)

<sup>56</sup> A few of the educated *madiga* men mention their caste as *madiga*, especially those who are politically active in the village and are also members of the local unit of the *Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi*, (MRPS) the organisation which has been fighting for the categorisation of Scheduled Castes of Andhra Pradesh into A, B, C and D groups.

The *bainlas* like *madigas* are mostly wage labourers both inside and outside agriculture, who also cultivate their smallholdings of land.

*Telugollu: Telugu* is an intermediary caste group officially categorised into OBC (Other Backward Classes) in the state. They are the largest group among the OBCs in the village with 37 households. Except a few families with surnames such as *boyini* and *kavali* the other members of the caste were traditionally involved in agricultural labour and cultivation. *Boyinis* and *kavalis* were traditional village servants. *Boyinis* used to guard the village tank and regulate the supply of water to the *ayacut* of the tank. They were also, therefore, called as *neeradikaru* (water administrators). The *kavalis*, called as *kavalikaru*, used to assist the *police patel*, *Mali patel* and other government officials. Till eight years ago (1998-99), when the village tank was in a position to irrigate at least one crop of paddy, *neeradikaru* were employed. They were paid by all the landholding families in the *ayacut* during the paddy harvest. In the Panchayati Raj system, the traditional *kavalikaru* are officially employed as 'village servants'. There are two 'village servants' in Chennaram. As there are about 10 families of *kavali* and *boyini* with traditional rights, the position of 'village servant' rotates yearly among these families. This caste is officially granted the fishing rights over the village tank. Presently, *telugollu* are predominantly engaged in wage labour and cultivation.

*Golla: Golla* is a traditional shepherd caste, categorised as OBC in the state. There are 27 *golla* households in the village. There are two sub-castes within the *gollas* of the village - *erra golla* and *pakanati golla*. Eleven *golla* households rear sheep. Apart from rearing sheep, *gollas* are engaged mostly in wage labour and own agriculture.

*Sakali: Sakali* is a traditional washerman caste. There are 17 *sakali* households in the village. Women in only four households continue their traditional activity of washing clothes, for which their patrons pay in grain during the harvest of major crops. They do not have SCs as their patrons. One household is mainly engaged in laundry work but not on any traditional arrangement. Both the husband and wife are engaged full-time in washing and ironing cloths in the village for which they charge money. Four households have men and women washing and ironing cloths in

Mumbai. Most of the men and women of this caste group are engaged in wage labour along with cultivation.

*Goud:* *Gouds* are traditional toddy tappers. There are seven households of this caste group in the village. This caste was earlier called in this region as *eediga*. In some parts of the state the caste was known as *goud* or *gouda*. With political leaders emerging from this caste, having *goud* as part of their names, *eedigas* also identify themselves with *gouds*. They changed their caste name to *goud* and also assert this identity by adding it to their names. Likewise *telugollu* also like to identify with the caste name name *muthiraj* or *mudhiraj* which exists in the city of Hyderabad. *Gouds* of this village do not tap toddy anymore. They sell toddy but not all at a time. There are three lineages among them. Each one sells toddy for a month on rotation. Interestingly, two brothers from this caste engage in carpentry and ironworks, and others are mostly engaged in wage labour apart from selling toddy (and liquor illegally) during their turn and also engage in cultivation.

*Vodde:* *Voddes* were traditionally known for breaking and shaping stone used in the construction of houses. There are three households of *vodde* caste in the village. One of them is landless and two of them bought some land recently. None of them engage in their traditional occupation. They had been doing wage labour in Mumbai for the past 25 years along with *telugollu*.

*Kummari:* *Kummaris* are traditional potters. There are two *kummari* households in the village. Elderly members in only one of the households continue pottery occasionally along with cultivation. The demand for pots is low and dwindling. It is only for some rituals and during summer that villagers use earthenware, unlike in the past. The elder members never left the village for work. But, the younger ones engage in wage labour in urban centres.

*Vodla:* *Vodlas* are traditional carpenters, categorised as OBC in the state. They eat only vegetarian food. They are considered ritually superior to *reddys*. There are two *vodla* households in the village. They still continue their traditional occupation along with their cultivation. Both the families purchased modern equipment for cutting wood. With the reduction in demand for agricultural equipment in recent times, most of the carpentry they get to do is for new house constructions.

*Pinjari:* *Pinjari* is a caste or sect among muslims. They are included in OBCs in the state. There is one *pinjari* household in the village. The head of the household drives his own jeep, his wife does agricultural wage labour and his son works as a sales boy in a flower vending shop in Mumbai. The small land holding they possess is leased out for sharecropping.

*Jangam:* *Jangam* is a traditional priest caste. In the past, they used to go to *reddy* houses, offer blessings and seek *bhiksham* (alms in the form of foodgrain and uncooked food). They are considered ritually superior to *reddys* and *vodla*. Not only the Scheduled Castes but also all other meat-eating castes were untouchables for *jangams*. They act as priests for themselves and other intermediary castes including *reddys*. There is only one *jangam* family in the village. They maintain their ritual purity by eating only vegetarian food. This family engages in cultivation. The head of the family is a retired government employee of the Road Transport Corporation and one of his sons is a mechanical engineer employed in an automobile company.

*Komati:* *Komatis* are traditional traders. In the *varna* system they are *vaishyas*. There are two *komati* families in the village. They had migrated from the Tirupati region and settled in the village about 25 years ago. They do not possess any lands. They both run small grocery shops, which also double up as tea stalls in the village. The younger male members work in the city of Hyderabad – one of them is a sales boy in a grocery shop and two of them are waiters in a hotel.

*Reddy:* *Reddys* are traditional cultivators. There are 63 *reddy* households in the village. Four generations ago two *reddy* families, one *police patel* and one *mali patel*, held more than 250 acres of land each. The former has only one descendant who is left with only one and a half acres of barren land. Among the *mali patel's* descendants only one family has 20 acres of land, six of them have between 10 to 15 acres of land and all others have less than 10 acres of land. There are two *reddy* families with landholdings of 25 and 29 acres respectively, which fall under the official category of large holdings (above 25 acres). More than 40 households of *reddys* engage in wage labour along with cultivating their own lands. Among the remaining, except two families who do not engage in manual work, men work in their own farms but women in some of the families do agricultural wage labour with other *reddys*. Some women only exchange labour with other *reddy* women, and a very few work solely in their

own farm. The two families that own 'large' holdings also regularly engage in manual work in their own farm along with hired labourers.

Two prominent *reddys* who are political contenders, one representing the Telugu Desam Party and the other the Congress Party, hold 13 and 15 acres respectively. The former had about 40 acres when he got separated from his brother, but sold most of his land. Politics is their prime activity, not agriculture. Both of them leased-out part of their lands. Both of them contract public works. One of them is also a moneylender. One was a proxy *sarpanch* as his wife got elected for the post when it was reserved for women (general). Then the next two consecutive terms, the other one got elected as *upa-sarpanch* (vice-president) and was a default *sarpanch* as he got his men elected for the *Sarpanch*.

### **3.2.3 Material conditions and amenities**

Table 3.6 shows that during the field survey 96% of the village households owned houses. The remaining 4% i.e., eight households among the OBCs and one among the OCs had no house of their own. A few of them collapsed and their households were thinking of constructing new houses. A few others started new households after separation and given the small size of their original house, it was either left to their parents or to one of the siblings, hope to construct a new one of their own. The ones without a house mostly stayed and worked away from the village and when they returned to the village they shared the house of their siblings.

There were more such households, but some obtained house loans from the government, and almost finished construction of houses. About 50 new houses were sanctioned in the year 2005-2006, under *Adarsha Gramam* (ideal village) programme initiated by the state government to comprehensively cover the needy for house loans, ration cards and pensions ( for the elderly, widows and disabled people). Some houses were in the initial stages of construction, which were not included in the census survey. However, not all those who were in need of a new house applied for a loan or claimed the sanctioned loan due to the lack of private funds. As the government's loan amount is not sufficient to complete the construction of a house, some chose to postpone and hoped to apply in the future. Some applied but failed to claim the sanctioned loan for failing to initiate the construction with one's own finances, which

was mandatory to obtain the loan amount. The loan amount, which was around Rs.45,000 hardly met half of the expenditure of the two room house. It was later increased to about Rs.70,000. Further, a considerable part of this loan was paid as bribe to the intermediaries for handling paperwork and to the government officials for approvals.

The housing mostly was had been with stone, for walls, roof and floor. Stone had replaced house construction with mud walls and mud roof supported by wood. Even some of the big houses in the past were made of mud. Later on even the poor and the small houses were constructed with stone. The latest pattern has been concrete roof and stone wall and floor. Most of the new houses that were undertaken with the support of government are of this pattern. Usually the house had a single entrance that leads to one room which is joined with another room on the one side and a small kitchen space on the other. 19% and 18% of the SC and OBC households respectively live in *kutchha* houses, which consist of mud walls and roofs made of traditional curved earthen tiles locally (called *bokulu or penkulu*) made by potters. They are supported by wood and mud beneath. These are no more available. A few of them are replaced by clay tiles. The houses that are grouped under *kutchha* houses here are slightly better placed than the typical thatched huts. Some of these households were sanctioned house loans, of which some have initiated construction. 38% and 20% of the SC and OBC households respectively live in houses that have only a single room.

**Table 3.6:** No. of households with varying status of electricity and drinking water connections, and housing conditions.

Commu nity	Total Househo- lds	Electricity		Drinking Water		House*		No. of rooms			
		Yes	No	Yes	No	<i>Kutchha</i>	<i>Pucca</i>	One	Two	Three	> Three
SC&ST	68	46(68)	22(32)	01(01)	67(99)	13(19)	55(81)	26(38 )	35(51 )	05(07 )	02(03)

OBC	97	75(77)	22(23)	29(30)	68(70)	16(18)	73(82)	18(20)	46(52)	13(15)	12(13)
OC	65	62(95)	03(05)	44(68)	21(32)	01(01)	63(99)	04(6)	15(23)	22((34)	23((36)
Total	<b>230</b>	<b>183(80)</b>	<b>47(20)</b>	<b>74(32)</b>	<b>156(68)</b>	<b>30(13)</b>	<b>191(87)</b>	<b>48(22)</b>	<b>96(43)</b>	<b>40(18)</b>	<b>37(16)</b>

\*The total no. of houses doesn't match with the total number of households in the table as eight households among the OBCs and one among the OCs did not own a house during the field survey (detailed in the text). Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages to the total households in respective rows.

Such single-roomed houses have to provide space within for living on one side and the hearth and cooking on the other. A few SC households with such houses have small structures made of brick and cement that were meant to be latrines. These four walled structures adjacent to houses, without any drainage or underground septic tank, are being used as kitchens by these households. Despite insufficient funds and meagre space of the house, housing had been the most important support measure of the government, especially for SCs. This process had been underway since the central government for the first time provided housing plots and houses in the late 1970s. The old generation among the SCs in the village still recall and regard this as the crucial measure for their betterment that accompanied distribution of process of land for cultivation and owe those measures to the then prime minister Indira Gandhi and the Congress party.

Chennaram received domestic electricity connections in the 1970s and for agriculture by 1977. But until the general elections for assembly in the year 2004 at least half of the SC and OBC households had no domestic connections, which means no electric light in their homes. The Congress party which came into power in these elections, implemented its pre-poll promise of supplying electricity free of cost for agriculture and also for those households with a single electric lamp or which utilized a minimum certain units of power. By the time of this survey many had applied for electricity meters and some had got unauthorised connections pending the sanction of meters. 32%, 23% and 5% of the SC, OBC and OC households respectively (Table 3.6) still had no electric lights in their homes. By the end of this field study in April, 2008 most of them got electricity and all households with meters were charged tariff. Only a few of those who were away from the village for most of the year without any member left at their homes did not show interest in seeking an electricity connection.

99%, 70% and 32% of the SC, OBC and OC households respectively, (Table 3.6) had no drinking water connections to their houses. They were dependent on public taps located in their vicinity. Of the remaining who had taps, a few were shared between households, and some used to run out of supply during summers. Shortage of drinking water had been a problem during summers. The public borewell dried up during the summer of 2006 and an attempt to drill another borewell deeper at the same point failed. Since then a temporary arrangement was made to supply water through the agricultural borewell owned by the *upa-sarpanch*, K.Reddy, who was paid by the government. In view of such shortage of water and some of the private taps running dry, those without private taps did not find it useful to spend on new connections.

Only five households had domestic cooking gas connections. All others used firewood for cooking. Except a couple of *reddy* households, no one had private latrines. There are no public lavatories either, like in other villages in this area. The public transport system was replaced by private carriers. The public bus facility which used to run between the village and the mandal head quarters (a market place and a hub to travel to other villages and towns) was withdrawn citing inadequate passengers after the arrival of autorickshaws and jeeps that transport people on any time of the day without waiting for a bus. This reduced the passenger count on buses. Such withdrawal of public buses occurred for most villages. Several youth in this area run autorickshaws over short distances and jeeps for long distances, carrying passengers usually many more than the stipulated number. It's an everyday sight where people travel sitting on top and hanging onto the sides and the rear of the vehicles. This is one important source of self-employment for the youth in rural areas, who mostly borrow money to buy vehicles from private finance companies.

#### **3.2.4. Gram panchayat and village politics**

Chennaram and another neighbouring village were part of single *gram panchayat* in the past. Chennarm village became a *panchayat* unit without any settlement attached to it from 1990. It is divided into eight wards. The families from the lineage of the traditional *mali patel* had been active in the panchayat and local elections while the *police patel* lineage, with only one offspring in each generation till now, had become bankrupt and played no active role in village politics.

Even though seats for ward members and the *sarpanch* in local bodies were reserved for SCs and STs from the beginning and to BCs from the 1980s, their role had been nominal even when they were elected. They were *de jure* but not *de facto*. They were mostly chosen and backed by contending *reddy* families linked to the two major political parties, the Congress and the Telugu Desam Party. When the *sarpanch* post was reserved for women (general), the elected member's husband, Kishan Reddy (pseudonym) was a *de factosarpanch*. This is more or less true in other villages as well when the posts are reserved for women.

When the *sarpanch* posts are reserved for SC, ST or OBC, both the aspiring *reddys* chose the candidates and spent money for their election. They contest as ward members in unreserved wards and make their way to the post of *upa-sarpanch*, and thus act as *de factosarpanches* depending on whose candidate won as *sarpanchde jure*.

However, the SCs and OBCs have become more assertive and are playing an active role in village and electoral politics since the last two decades. Various factors including horizontal caste solidarities and individual choice, and alignment with some *reddy* families in an attempt to defeat another *reddy* or group of families are in play. A few educated SCs and OBCs have emerged as active *pairavikaar*(intermediaries) between villagers and government offices and banks and get official paperwork done without having to depend on the politically active *reddys*. Although electorally they could not attain decisive strength yet, they posed a considerable challenge to the influence of *reddys*. To cite one instance, one of the panchayat wards, which was unreserved during the 2006 elections but had substantial population of SCs, was contested by one SC youth and a *reddy* woman backed by the influential K. Reddy, who was a *de factosarpanch* in consecutive terms between 2000 and 2012. Despite the latter's efforts, the SC candidate won the election reflecting the solidarity among the SCs in the village.

However, despite such horizontal solidarities among the SCs and OBCs, they cannot be clearly seen in local elections. This is because the reservations of posts make the local body electoral contests mostly between the families of same caste or between castes within a reserved category/group. Some families within a caste or most often families connected through kinship have conflicts between them, where

the enmity is stronger than hostility feeling between ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ castes. For example, brothers establishing households after separation from the parent household, in some cases, exhibit more hatred towards each other after disputes over property, and tend to associate with contending parties.

Further, if there is more than one caste within a reserved category, it leads to segregation between such castes to an extent during elections. Even if a particular caste group more or less exhibits caste solidarity, another caste group within a reserved category which is not necessarily in conflict with the former may vote against the former because a member from the latter is usually persuaded to contest against the former caste member. This occurred between the *golla* and *telugu* castes, both OBC, as the members contesting for *sarpanch* post in the 2013 *gram panchayat* elections came from these two castes although there was no history of conflict between these castes.

## Chapter- 4

### Land and Agriculture

This chapter attempts to understand the productive basis or more precisely the economic dimension of social relations in the village. The village's economic system was largely based on land and agriculture. The demographic changes and the larger changes in political economy have had a significant impact on the distribution of land and the way agricultural production is organised. Anthropologists initially viewed the 'highly differentiated nature' of village communities in India in terms of caste.<sup>57</sup> The 'Intimate linkage' between organisation of production and caste was recognised in due course.<sup>58</sup> Understanding the differentiation in control over land in a land-based economic system, and more broadly, the study of 'agrarian systems', therefore, became important in the studies on caste and the village.

The objective of this chapter is twofold. To analyse and document the changes in ownership and use of land, and changes in agriculture at a micro-level, which are in themselves considered important.<sup>59</sup> Such an analysis in a differentiated village community forms a meaningful basis to understand economic, social relations and inequality between and among various social categories.

Study of the agricultural economy of the village is, however, is only a part of the village economy that extends beyond agriculture as well as the borders of the village. Non-agricultural economic activity, its significance and its relation to agrarian economy are discussed in later chapters. This chapter deals with the issues of land and the technological aspects of agriculture, while the social arrangements relating to

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<sup>57</sup> Such differentiated nature of families in Indian villages set them distinct from that of the so-called 'peasantry' (Beteille, 2007)

<sup>58</sup> The recognition of the linkage between caste and the production system by scholars like M.N.Srinivas, thus, brought about a gradual shift from ideationalist preoccupation to materialist emphasis of caste.

<sup>59</sup> The importance of micro-level studies based on long term fieldwork is long established in India. To cite an example from the experience of fieldwork for the present study, it was observed and recorded that certain sections are being dispossessed of hitherto existing sources of irrigation and that these sections are not in a position to access other source and technology of irrigation. Whereas, analyses based on statistics of growth in irrigation at district or regional levels depict such growth, along with growth rates in production, in positive light but do not and cannot conceive of the sections excluded from such growth stories. Further, only observation in the field could help understand the topography of the command area under redundant tanks that even rainfed cultivation was not undertaken due to water logging in monsoon season. And, this could explain partly the cause for increase in fallow land in the district.

agricultural production are discussed in the next chapter. First, the distribution of land and disparity in distribution between and among caste groups is analysed based on the village census survey conducted during the field study. Changes in the structure of land are documented and the causes for these changes are discussed. As part of this, transfer of land through sale, fragmentation and dispersal of land are also looked at. Second, it deals with the technological aspects of agriculture: the importance of irrigation and change in technology and source of irrigation; differentiation in access to old and new technologies and sources of irrigation and differential outcomes; the State's role through intervention, withdrawal and neglect in the development and underdevelopment of agriculture and its impact on regional and class lines.

Further, this chapter attempts to analyse the state of agriculture and the extent of its importance for the livelihoods of various sections of the village. The dynamics of land and agriculture are broadly analysed through the categories of region, caste and class in the light of the larger political economy of agrarian change. The category of class, in this chapter, is invoked loosely, based merely on the size of land owned. However, such differentiation of classes generally coincides here with the classes based on, and closely linked to the criterion of the nature of labour rendered or employed (as used in the later chapters).

#### **4.1.1 Ownership of land**

Only 3% of the households in Chennaram are landless, who own no agricultural or barren land apart from their homestead land. The remaining 97% of the households own land. Some of them are merely technically not landless because the extent of land they own is meagre. But if the agricultural produce from the land owned is considered then around one-fourth of the households may be on par with landless households as their land is either left fallow or the produce is negligible. If the income from the agricultural land is considered, then around half of the households are not significantly better off by virtue of owning land from those who are landless despite their efforts in cultivation. Even in such circumstances, however, land is still valued and aspired to be possessed not only because of the absence of other livelihood options but also because of its value as property.

There are seven households in the village without any land. One household belongs to the *reddy* caste, which sold their land and became landless. One *sakali* and

one *goud* household are landless because they had no share in ancestral land as the women, after marriage, returned and settled down in their maternal village. Two *komati* caste households, who migrated and settled in this village some 25 years ago, are landless. Three *vodde* households had no land of their own, but two of them recently bought land while one of them is still landless, while one *madiga* household has been landless and continues to be so.

The remaining households possess land but the extent of land possessed varies among the households, ranging from a quarter of an acre to 29 acres. 18% of the households hold less than or equal to one acre of land (Table 4.1). Around 46% of the households fall under the ‘marginal’ category (less than 1 hectare of land) (Table 4.2). Nearly 72% of SCs own ‘marginal’ holdings of land. No SC household has more than five acres of land. All of them fall under ‘marginal’ and ‘small’ landholding categories. The ‘small’ (1-2 hectares) and ‘marginal’ category landholdings constitute around 73% of the village holdings. The percentage of households which fall under the categories of ‘semi-medium’ (2-4 hectares), ‘medium’ (4-10 hectares) and ‘large’ (10 and above hectares) holdings of land are 18%, 7% and 0.9% respectively.

**Table 4.1:** Landholdings size-wise (in acres) classification of households of Chennaram

Community	0	0.1-1	1.1-2.5	2.6-3.5	3.6-5.0	5.1-7.5	7.6-10	10.1-12.5	12.6-15.0	15.1-20	20.1-25	25+
SC	1	19	31	6	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ST	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	3	18	38	15	19	5	1	2	0	0	0	0
OC	3	3	7	5	16	3	12	7	4	1	0	2
Total	7	41	76	26	45	8	13	9	4	1	0	2

These figures drawn up from village census survey as part of this study are ‘ownership holdings’. Here ownership holding is the total agricultural land owned by a household, which in some cases may be barren or fallow land. It excludes ‘homesteads’, the land meant for residence presently or for the future construction of a house. Unlike in some parts of India where homesteads constitute a considerable part of agricultural production or subsistence production, homesteads here do not cater to such production activity to any significant extent. These figures of ‘ownership

holdings’ for the village are similar to the district averages for ‘operational holdings’<sup>60</sup> in their size-categories – 47.96%, 26.41%, 17.58%, 6.89% and 1.14% of ‘marginal’, ‘small’, ‘semi-medium’, ‘medium’ and ‘large’ holdings respectively in the district (presented in table 3.1, chapter-3). Operational holdings are not presented for the village because they coincide very closely with ownership holdings due to scarce incidence of tenancy. The official figures of operational holdings for the district also seem to be very close to the ownership holdings not only because the incidence of tenancy is low in this district but it is known that the area under tenancy is not revealed and, therefore, underestimated in official data except, to some reliable extent, in sample surveys of NSSO.

**Table 4.2:** Landholding size category-wise (official categories) classification of households in Chennaram

Community	Below 1 Ha(Marginal)	1-2 Ha(Small)	2-4 Ha(Semi-medium)	4-10 Ha(Medium)	10 & above Ha.(Large)
SC	48	14	4	0	0
ST	1	0	0	0	0
OBC	46	34	14	2	0
OC	8	13	23	14	2
Total	103(46.18%)	61(27.35%)	41(18.38%)	16(7.17%)	2 (0.9%)

In other words, the land structure of the village in terms of size-class categories resembles the district profile of land structure. One important criterion for selecting this village for field study was this. Further, the data on ‘ownership holdings’ of this field study too strengthened this fact. The assumption being that the structure of ownership of land, along with the caste composition, has a significant role in shaping social dynamics in the village. Choosing a village that is close to the

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<sup>60</sup>Operational holding is defined as “all land which is used wholly or partly for agricultural production and is operated as one technical unit by one person or with others without regard to the title, legal form, size or location” in Agricultural Census (Agricultural Census: Concepts and Definitions, <http://agcensus.nic.in/M3.htm>). Technically, operational holdings are divided into individual, joint and institutional. However, joint and institutional holdings are negligible when compared to individual holdings. Individual holdings represent the area operated by households as a unit: If the holding is being operated either by one person alone or by group of persons who are the members of the same household it will be considered as an individual holding. Similar definition is used by NSSO for operational holdings (see NSSO, 2001). Individual ‘operational’ holdings (official) are considered here for comparison with ‘ownership’ holdings (from this field study) because we do not have official census data on ownership holdings. The data on ownership holdings available in India is only based on sample surveys by NSSO. The data presented in their reports is aggregated for regions. The sample data for this particular district could not be accessed.

district's profile of landholding structure and caste composition may reasonably reflect the nature of agrarian relations beyond this particular village.

**Table 4.3:** Community-wise total landholding area and average size of landholding

Community	No. of households	% of total households	Total area owned	% of the total area	Average size of holding
SC	67	29	132	15.5	1.97
OBC	97	43	282	32.7	2.84
OC	65	28	439	51.5	6.75
Total	229*		853		3.67

\*Excluding one ST household

A comparison of landholdings between and among castes shows that 71.6% of SC households, 46.4% of OBC households and 12.7% of *reddy* households own 'marginal' landholdings. 20.9% of the SC households, 34% of the OBC households and 20.6% of the *reddy* households own 'small' landholdings. 5.9% of SC households, 14.1% of the OBC households and 36.5% of the *reddy* households own 'semi-medium' landholdings. No SC household, 2% of OBC households and 22% of the *reddy* households own 'medium' landholdings. 3% (two) of the *reddy* households and none of the SC and OBC households own 'large' landholdings. Among *reddys*, who own major part of the village land, three households own 20, 26 and 29 acres and 13 households own between 10 and 15 acres of land and 33% (twenty two) of them own less than 5 acres and 36.5% (twenty three) of them own 5 and below 10 acres of land. 92.5% of SC, 80% of OBC and 33.3% of *reddy* households constitute nearly three fourths of the village households, but own less than five acres of land.

If we compare the total area of land owned by the households of a caste as a whole (as shown in the table 4.3), 51.5% of the total village land is owned by *reddys* who constitute 28% of the village households, 33% by OBCs that constitute 43% of the total households and 15.5% by SCs that constitute 29% of the village households. The average size of the landholdings among SCs, OBCs and OCs is 1.97 acres, 2.84 acres and 6.75 acres respectively. The ST community is not compared because of the presence of only one family. This family, which previously was landless, holds half an acre of barren land (never cultivated) granted by the government during Indira Gandhi's regime. It is said that altogether around 12 acres of land was distributed among SC and ST families of this village during the same period.

#### **4.1.2 Change in the size of landholdings: Fragmentation and Dispersal**

The region of Telangana, as discussed in the chapter-2, had land concentrated in the hands of a small number of *jagirdars* and, later, *deshmuks*, landlords and rich peasants (Pavier, 1981). Along with *deshmuks* who held land covering several villages, there were small landlords, whose holdings spread over a village or two, and also rich peasants (ibid). The figures of the administrative report of 1950-51 reveal that the three districts of Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda and Warangal together had around 550 *pattedars* who held more than 500 acres of land (cited in Sundarayya, 1972). The 1929-30 Economic Investigations found that 38.3% of the rural resident families were landless (Iyengar, 1931). After about 20 years there was a reduction, recorded by the 1949-51 Economic Enquiries, in the size of cultivating families who were landless (Iyengar, 1951). Yet in the early 1950s a village studied in this region by S.C. Dube had 29 families holding three-fourths of the village land, 160 families holding one-fourth of it and 140 families without land (Dube, 1955)<sup>61</sup>.

In the Telangana region, before Independence, Pavier argues that at no point of time were the poor peasants and the agricultural labourers less than 60% of the rural population. After Independence the landholding inequality has reduced in Telangana. In 1954, 40% of the landholdings were small and marginal holdings (less than 2 hectares) operating 16% of the total area and 39.5% held more than 4 hectares of land (medium and large) operating 69% of the total area. By 1986-87 the small and marginal category holdings increased to nearly 70% of the total holdings operating 27% of the total area. The middle and the large category had reduced to 12.4% of the total holdings operating 48.8% of the total area. In 1954, 6% of the holdings were above 20 hectares operating an area of 22%. In 1986-87, all those holding above 10 hectares had come down to 2.3% operating 19% of the area (Reddy, 1987; Vakulabharanam, 2004). If we compare these figures with those of 2001 for the district of Mahbubnagar (given in table-3.1, chapter-3), the large category had reduced to 1.1% and the small and marginal categories combined, have increased to 74% of the total holdings.

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<sup>61</sup>Chapter 2 in this dissertation contains a more detailed discussion on land holding pattern during this period.

In the Chennaram village, like in the region, there had been a significant change in the structure of landholdings. Fragmentation of landholdings occurred mostly because of inheritance divisions and to some extent because of sale. The following example illustrates this process.

As mentioned in the last chapter, two *reddy* families, one *mali patel* and one *police patel*, four generations ago held nearly 300<sup>62</sup> acres of land each. The *policepatel* lineage had only one son in each generation. But the great grandson in the present generation of the *policepatel's* lineage inherited only one and a half acres of barren land. He works in Mumbai under a contractor and his wife does wage labour. His grandfather and father sold all their land. On the other hand, the *mali patel's* lineage had three sons in the next generation. The eldest one, who was entitled to the *mali patel's* position, had only one son who in turn had two sons in the present generation. They both inherited around 40 acres each when they got divided but sold most of it. One of them holds 13 acres and the other holds 20 acres of land, which is the highest among all the descendants of these two lineages. Apart from these two lineages there were also other *reddys* who held considerable land. Presently there are only two *reddys*, from outside the lineages mentioned above, who own large holdings. One possesses 26 acres and the other 29 acres. The former has 4 sons, three of them married, division of land may happen soon. Thus, most of the village land, which was held by a few *reddys*, got fragmented largely because of sharing inheritance and partly due to sale.

Although dispersal had been a major trend, concentration too occurred in few families that engaged in own cultivation, or those that acquired land. The *policepatel's* lineage started selling land because of the pressure of land reforms on the one hand and for the first time there were families eager to buy land. Leading lavish lifestyles and thriving on sale of land, the *policepatel's* lineage within three generations slipped in the economic and social ladder. Abolition of the *patel* system

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<sup>62</sup>C.Reddy who was *mali patel*, till this system was abolished during chief minister N.T. Rama Rao's rule (during 1980s), and was quite aware of the land records of the village. He says that his grandfather along with his two brothers got 80 acres each from their father's property (Basi Reddy, another descendent of the same lineage puts this share at 90 acres). He says, therefore, that his great grand father held not less than 240 acres. He also adds that the *policepatel* of his great grand father's generation had more than his ancestors. These estimates are also confirmed by other villagers including the grandson of the then *police patel*.

further contributed to the lowered socioeconomic position. The socioeconomic position of the *police patel* lineage could not translate into better economic status for the present generation. One family which had about 30 acres of land (a descendant of the *mali patel* but had no rights over the title) gathered wealth through its activity of lending-out grain for interest, and started buying land. The two descendents in the next generation continued this activity and started lending money as well. They bought so much land that when they got separated, each got a share of about 60 acres. In this way a few more families accumulated land, who had considerable land but less than that of the *patels*. But very soon fragmentation of land started with multiple descendants and growing life-expectancy rates unlike in the past. One of the brothers, who got 60 acres for his share, in the case mentioned above, has four sons and the other has two sons in the present generation. Some of them in this generation sold part of the land, they got after division.

An attempt is made here to calculate the transfer of lands because of sale and to estimate the transfer of land between the castes and also to examine if the process of concentration or dispersal of land is taking place in ways apart from the natural fragmentation due to demographic changes. In the census survey conducted in the village, each household was asked if a household had bought or sold land and from or to which caste household. This enquiry was done for the last 15 years. The time frame was chosen so as to get relatively accurate figures as a longer period would complicate the estimates. It is also to examine the impact or relation of the agrarian crisis on the sale of lands, which was documented by scholars for this period.

The results of sales over the last 15 years are presented in the table 4.4. Among SCs, 17 households bought a total of 22.5 acres of land and 4 households sold a total of 4.5 acres of land. Among OBCs, 37 households bought a total of 63 acres of land and 8 households sold a total of 9 acres of land. And, among *reddys*, 13 households bought a total of 20 acres of land and 31 households sold a total of around 90 acres of land. While the number of households among SCs and OBCs which bought land is more than that of those which sold, the number of households among *reddys* which sold land is more than those which bought land. The results, on the whole, show that the net movement of land has been from *reddys* mostly to OBCs and

partly to SCs. About 18 and 54 acres of land was bought by SCs and OBCs respectively, whereas 70 acres of land was sold by the *reddy* caste in the last 15 years.

There were transactions not only between castes but also within castes. There are cases of buying from and selling land to people from neighbouring villages. Even in such instances the caste group that bought or sold land was recorded. There were also a few instances where households sold dry land to buy wet land, old land which was far off from the village to buy a piece of land which was near to the village. These results also confirm the general view among the villagers, although overstated, that *reddys* have been selling lands and OBCs and SCs have been buying those lands.

Table : 4.4 : Caste-/community-wise sale of land (acres) in the last 15 years

Community	No of HHsbought land	TotalLand Bought	No of HHs which sold	TotalLand Sold	Change in Quantum
SC	17	22.5	4	4.5	+18
ST	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	37	63	8	9	+54
OC	13	20	31	90	-70
Total	67	105.5	43	103.5	

These figures are not strictly from the last 15 years as some of the respondents might have mentioned transactions which were older than 15 years. This exercise is made more difficult, as in some cases the households which bought or sold land in the last fifteen years have divided. Although the figures may not be accurate, the purpose of this estimation of movement of land through sales was to document broad trends.

The reasons for sale of land and the implications of such fragmentation and dispersal of land, among other reasons, on the control of labour, demand for labour and the forces balancing power relations in the village will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Agriculture**

### **4.2.1. Irrigation: Shift in source and technology**

There has been a drastic shift from surface water irrigation to groundwater irrigation. Surface water traditionally had been a major source of irrigation in the

district until two decades ago. Surface water was retained in tanks with bunds that were constructed and maintained to restrict rain water from flowing down slope. This water which flows due to gravity was directed to the fields through the construction of small canals. Apart from surface water irrigation, groundwater irrigation technology was also prevalent. Groundwater was harnessed by digging open wells ranging from 20 to 30 feet<sup>63</sup> deep. Water was drawn out in large metal pots with the help of bullocks, locally called *motalu*. *Motalu* were gradually replaced by pump sets run by diesel engines in the 1970s, and later by electric pumps in the 1980s. While tanks were a collective resource maintained by the state, open wells were private properties. Even though tanks were a common resource, water was distributed unequally. The distribution was according to the size of land owned under the command area which was also skewed in favour of certain landowners. However, it seems that landlessness related to land under tank was less than dry land (discussed a little later). Digging openwells was an expensive affair. Owners of large tracts of land could afford such wells. These manually dug openwells were replaced by narrow tube wells which dug deep with mechanized drills. Pumps were used to draw water. This new technology made it possible to extract ground water from hundreds of feet below the surface of the earth. It was less expensive and accessible to many more cultivators compared to openwells. But the benefits of this technology are restricted by geographic and climatic conditions on the one hand and the economic position of the cultivating households on the other as it had to be developed with private investment. In regions like Mahbubnagar, scanty rainfall sets low limits to the water table and, thus, to ground water irrigation.

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<sup>63</sup> Reddy, V.Ramakrishna (1987) in his 'Economic History of Hyderabad State (Warangal Suba: 1911-1950)' notes that the significance of irrigation was realized as early as 13<sup>th</sup> century in the region and that tank irrigation was developed since then. In Warangal division (this division the study deals with consisted of three districts) during the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, tanks and *kuntas* (small tanks bounded with earth) together were more than eight thousand in number constituting around three fourths of the source of irrigated area (ibid, Table XXII and Table XXIII:171-79). Well irrigation was also developed in this region. Total wells were more than forty thousand in number in 1926, constituted nearly 80 percent of the total irrigation sources and catered to nearly 10 percent of the irrigated area (ibid: Table XXII and Table XXIII:171-79). Most of the wells were privately owned. Part of them was supported by the government laying certain conditions, and later the same were administered by a Department that was started in 1928 for well-sinking (ibid:171). However, it is noted that the area irrigated as proportion of total cultivated area had never been more than 19 percent until 1950 (ibid:176). Also see Pingle (2011) for the history of tank irrigation in Telangana region.

Table-4.5 shows that from the 1950s to mid-1970s the area irrigated under tanks for the district of Mahabubnagar was more than 60,000 hectares with some fluctuations in between. Since then there had been a steep fall in the area irrigated by tanks. The area under dugwells increased steeply from 1970s, touching a peak (nearly 90,000 hectares) by 1990-91. During this time the area under tanks reduced to 43,000 hectares. This period between 1970 and 1990 that witnessed 243% (63,000 hectares) increase in well irrigation reveals a shift in cropping pattern from rainfed to irrigated crops. With the new technology of deep borewells being adopted more rampantly, tanks and openwells have become redundant. The area irrigated under tanks became almost nil (only 1,000 hectares) and the area under dug wells reduced to just 10,000 hectares, while the irrigated area under borewells shot up from just 5,000 hectares in 1990-91 to 1,18,000 hectares by 2006-07. Because of a decrease in the area under tanks and dug wells, this enormous increase in the area irrigated under borewells from the early nineties to the turn of the millennium has actually meant only 18.2% and 18.7% increase in net and gross irrigated area respectively. Even this increase was not sustained. By 2006-07 both the net and gross irrigated area stood at what it was in the early 1990s, even though rainfall was normal in the two years (2005, 2006), unlike the drought years of 2002-04. There seems no hope of reversal in the situation of dried up tanks and dug wells. Mahabubnagar district presents the same trend as that of the region<sup>64</sup> and especially that of south Telangana where the decline from the latter sources is extreme.<sup>65</sup> One of the reasons for the decline in tank irrigation has been attributed to declining public investment in minor irrigation resulting in non-maintenance of tanks.<sup>66</sup> Another important cause seems to be excessive exploitation of groundwater whereby the balance between surface and ground water is disturbed. Tanks do not seem to retain water for long, which percolates quickly due to exhausted

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<sup>64</sup> See Ratna Reddy, V (2003) and Pingle, 2011

<sup>65</sup> The decline in tank irrigation has occurred across the state of Andhra Pradesh. It has been extreme in the case of south Telangana region and Rayalaseema where the rainfall is scanty.

<sup>66</sup> See Ratna Reddy, 2003, Subrahmanyam and Shekar, 2003 and Pingle, 2011; Although the state government has implemented three schemes, namely *Neeru-Meeru*, Watershed and Water harvesting, in the recent years to improve the situation of surface irrigation and recharging of ground water, Malla Reddy(2008) argues that these schemes were unsuccessful because they were “unscientific” and, rather, water did not flow into tanks to the normal extent. Further, instead of implementing these schemes only in ‘grey’ and ‘dark’ areas (where the groundwater level has gone critically low), they were implemented in delta regions benefitting contractors and earth moving machinery owners (Malla Reddy, 2008:207).

water table. And, negligence in maintenance of tanks in turn does not recharge water table to sufficient levels.

#### **4.2.2. Groundwater irrigation: Distribution and disparity**

For long political activists alleged that the region of Telangana had been neglected in terms of development of irrigation and that there had been discrimination against this region in public spending for canal irrigation. Yet, there had been an increase in the area irrigated in the region owing to groundwater irrigation, mostly based on private expenditure.<sup>67</sup> In order to compensate for public spending in canal irrigation, the government implemented 'free electric power' supply to farms those investing privately in groundwater irrigation. Power supply to farms was limited to seven hours a day.

Here, we look at access to this new irrigation technology and whether it is evenly distributed among various sections of cultivators compared to earlier sources of irrigation. So far, studies have documented the risk and high expenditure involved in groundwater irrigation, which had been recognised as one of the causes of indebtedness in this region<sup>68</sup>. But there is no study that documents the disparity in access to groundwater irrigation and how such disparity shapes further inequality among cultivators. The questions probed here are 1) Whether all those cultivators who were deprived of traditional irrigation are now compensated with access to new irrigation technologies? And, 2) whether the new technologies have spread across sections more evenly than the traditional sources of irrigation?

Chennaram has a tank<sup>69</sup> which, twelve years ago (until 1998-99), was a source of irrigation for more than hundred acres of land as shown in Table-4.9. Except during droughts this tank used to cater to paddy cultivation in the entire *ayacut* (command area) during first crop and at least half for second crop. Many of the small and marginal landholding families own land under the *ayacut* of the tank. Some of those

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<sup>67</sup>See Ratna Reddy, 2003; Vakulabharanam, 2004; Govt. of AP and CESS, 2008; Govt. of India, 2010 and Pingle, 2011

<sup>68</sup>See Parthasarathy, G and Shameem (1998), Revathi, E (1998), Sainath, P (2004), Govt. of AP (2005) and Govt. of AP and CESS (2008).

<sup>69</sup>This tank is a notified tank. 'Notified tank', officially, is one which has an *ayacut* of more than 100 acres of land. Those above 100 acres of command area are administered by the Minor Irrigation Department and those below 100 acres are under Panchayat Raj. The situation of the latter ones is considered to have deteriorated more severely due to paucity of funds (Malla Reddy, 2008).

with no land elsewhere also possess a small patch of land under the tank. This had been the case in the region despite “monopolisation” of land in the past.<sup>70</sup>

Household data for this village shows that 58% of the village households own land within the *ayacut* of tank— 62% of SCs, 58% of OBCs and 54% of the OCs – ranging from a few *guntas*<sup>71</sup> to 4 acres. All the households with land under the tank are now deprived of irrigation. The fact that is to be underlined is that 77% of those who hold land under the tank do not have access to water under any source – 39 out of 40 households among SCs, 48 out of 57 among OBCs and 13 out of 34 among OCs – after the tank stopped retaining water. The remaining ones have access to borewell irrigation elsewhere. Previously, altogether, 131 households had access to irrigation under the tank (apart from openwells), but presently only 83 households have access to irrigation only under borewells. Viewed in terms of size-class of holdings, as presented in Table-4.7, 50% of households with marginal holdings own land under the tank but only 20% have access to borewells. While 62% of households owning small holdings own land under tank, only 24% have access to borewell water. Presently, 155 acres of land in the village is irrigated only with the source of borewells. 70% of it is created and accessed by OC households, 22% by OBC households and 7% by SC households. Corresponding percentages of land owned under tank are 49% by OCs, 35% by OBCs and 17% by SCs. Even before the adoption of borewells, OCs had more dug wells compared to other caste groups, but tank was a source of irrigation to many. Often villagers express their anguish about the tank drying up. The importance they attribute to the tank is understood only after realising the fact that paddy grown

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<sup>70</sup> Iyengar(1932)'s *Economic Investigations in the Hyderabad State, 1929-30 (Vol.III)* reveals that despite large scale “monopolization” of land in the region in the past which ranged from hundreds to thousands of acres, the wet land under tanks which was more productive (which is reflected in the way wet land changed hands “quicker than dry lands” and “more and more into the hands of non-cultivating persons”(p.8-9) and scarcely available was highly fragmented and occupied by many. These investigations point out that considerable number of the villagers held bits of wet land only. Also, Iyengar(1951)'s *Rural Economic Enquiries in the Hyderabad State, 1949-50* points out, for the erstwhile state as a whole, “With regard to wet land, cultivation holdings of less than 2 acres constitute 65.0 per cent, where as holdings of 5 acres and more comprise 11.8 percent”. It is to be noted that tanks were the predominant irrigation sources then. In the year 1940-41, 67% of the total irrigated area was contributed by tanks

<sup>71</sup> 40 *guntas*=1 acre; 2.4 acres=1 ha; Some of the households do not mention the size of the holding under tank in terms of acres or *guntas*. The plots most of them own are too small after so many divisions. It is difficult to get the actual magnitude of their holdings under tank also because it is a practice that they mention the size of land under tank in terms of the measure of paddy seed required to cultivate these plots, like *seru vodla bhoomi* or *manedu vodla bhoomi*.

under the tank was an important part of their subsistence. Those without access to groundwater irrigation have to now purchase rice for consumption. Further, not even rainfed crops are cultivated under the tank because of water logging during the monsoon.

To conclude, the data clearly reveals the following: One, the irrigated land under borewells is more unequally distributed than the land which used to be irrigated under the tank. Most groundwater irrigation is created by large, medium and semi-medium cultivators mostly belonging to OCs. Two, while all land-size categories of cultivators owning land under the tank have lost irrigation, marginal and small cultivators are dispossessed of irrigation altogether without making up for this loss by groundwater irrigation, which required substantial investment.

#### **4.2.3. Private investment and risk in groundwater irrigation**

Borewells have brought with them a huge cost. There were about 22 privately owned dugwells for the purpose of irrigation. Most of these were dug long ago and as these were ancestral property. Multiple descendant families were dependant for irrigation on each of these wells. All the dugwells have dried up after the borewells were sunk in their vicinity. Initially, better-off farmers successfully adopted the new technology of borewells to increase the area under irrigation to cultivate paddy. Dry-land crops were not only more vulnerable to uncertainties of rainfall but became less remunerative. Crops dependent on controlled irrigation, particularly paddy, were found to provide assured returns and higher income per unit area. Also, with a decline in the size of holdings they started exploring possible options to increase income within the available holdings. Witnessing the initial successes of borewell irrigation many cultivators started drilling borewells. This led to the drying up of all the dug wells in the village. Some of them drilled borewells inside the dug wells. Some of the OBCs who dug openwells just before the spread of borewell technology suffered losses the most. Not only dug wells, but the borewells that were drilled initially started drying up after many more deeper borewells were sunk. Not only this, but for

every borewell running two borewells had failed.<sup>72</sup> OCs alone have sunk around 100 borewells, but only 31 of them are functioning. Some of them were drilled only to find no water and some of them failed later. Two households which have substantial holdings of land have sunk 14 borewells each, while for each holding only two are functioning.

Another trend in the recent years is that marginal and small holding cultivators from backward communities are also resorting to borewells. Some of them ventured in partnership. Wage labourers with small holdings of land who make little money after several years of toiling away from the village aspire to dig a borewell and settle down in agriculture, but with failure they fall into the vicious cycle of digging multiple borewells. An extreme case is of one SC household, whose adult members had been migrant wage labourers in Mumbai for the last twenty years. This household made six attempts to sink a borewell. The sixth attempt was successful, making it possible for wet cultivation in 1.5 acres out of their five acres of dry land. But altogether the household incurred an expenditure of one lakh rupees. Drilling itself, even if no water is found, cost around Rs.10,000 to 12,000 depending on the depth. If it is a successful borewell, then it will cost a minimum of around Rs.30,000 for a pump set and motor. There are also costs for along casing (pvc pipe) to protect the well from caving in. If there is no electricity line/cable near the field, an additional charge of Rs. 5,000 for the distance between the electricity poles has to be incurred privately. In some cases, there are additional costs for the pipeline if the borewell and the land to be irrigated is located either away or at a higher elevation. After all this expenditure, within a few months or after one or two successful crops the borewell may completely yield no water if the water table within its reach is exhausted. Because of this huge expenditure and the high risk involved, some of the cultivators sink borewells in partnership. There are 23 such borewells between partners, ranging from two to six partners for a single borewell. There are 30 individually owned borewells.

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<sup>72</sup> Other studies put the proportion of failed wells even higher. For example K.P.C. Rao based on ICRISAT studies of six villages (two of which are from this district -Mahabubnagar) in the semi-arid tropics (SAT) notes, "446 households in the sample have together made 551 attempts to gain access to water during the study period of two decades", 1985-2004. "But only 36 out of the 100 attempts made are successful in that they are still yielding some water. Regarding investments and returns from groundwater irrigation, he further adds, "[o]n an average, a sample household invested Rs.16,233 in water exploration... Although the returns are not high, there is a stability of income for those having access to irrigation". (Rao, K.P.C, 2008:575-76)

Altogether, 83 households own 53 borewells. A few households among OCs own more than one borewell. But even a ‘successful’ borewell does not supply water to more than two acres of paddy during the second crop.

Even after repeated failures and being aware of non-availability of water table and the risk involved with every attempt of sinking a borewell, cultivators still take the risk for a new borewell. Cultivators here often say, “No family can survive solely depending on dry land crops. Either one has to do wage labour abandoning agriculture or continue to struggle within agriculture. Hence, there is this hunt for water in earth. The success of borewells has become like a lottery. One succeeds out of many. And, one success gives hope to many others to try yet again. As one digs deeper and deeper for water, one gets deeper and deeper into debt.”

There is no support from local experts, such as the designated geologists, to assess the availability of groundwater in a given area. Rather, drilling borewells is now officially discouraged in view of the declining water table. There is no regulation to check the number of borewells per household<sup>73</sup>. A restriction on the number of borewells per household could have perhaps promoted a more equitable distribution of groundwater which is, otherwise, a common resource. Numerous *swamys* (astrologer-cum-priests) have emerged ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ for their predictions about borewell locations. They ‘predict’ the success of a borewell for a particular person at a particular auspicious time and at a particular spot in the field, without having to visit the field. All are aware that the ‘success’ rates of these *swamys*’ predictions are very low. But, cultivators in their desperate attempts to drill borewells seek out these *swamys* in order to strengthen their own resolve. Borewell drilling machine owners have also evolved schemes for customers keeping in mind the success and failure of borewells. Not surprisingly, even middlemen have emerged in this borewell ‘industry’, who encourage farmers and coordinate between the farmers and owners of drilling machines.

During my stay in the village for fieldwork, I came to know of over a dozen cases of households that attempted to sink borewells. Not surprisingly, only one

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<sup>73</sup> Andhra Pradesh Water and Land Tree Act, 2002 (WALTA) was passed to check indiscriminate exploitation of groundwater and environmental degradation. This Act, however, has been ineffective “due to lack of enforcement machinery” (Malla Reddy, 2008:209).

succeeded. There are no official statistics available for the number of borewells that are attempted and failed. It may be said, based on the interactions with farmers in the district, that for every borewell that is functioning three to five borewells might have failed. The borewells which presently run are the ones sunk in the recent years. One hardly finds a borewell that is more than five years old. The Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad, conducted a survey in seven districts in the state covering 3,861 cultivator households during the year 2004. According to this survey 26% of the farmers have invested in borewells during the previous five years. It was highest in south Telangana (which includes the field area under study), where nearly 50% of the farmers invested on borewells and 66.5% of the investment was lost due to failure of borewells (CESS, 2008:72)<sup>74</sup>.

Groundwater irrigation *per se* is not an unviable mode of irrigation. It is viable in those regions where there is optimal rainfall and surface irrigation to recharge the water table. This technology has had positive results in regions that receive higher rainfall. Had it been only a one-time investment with sustained irrigation, this technology would have perhaps reached a large section of small and marginal cultivators. But the high rate of failure in finding the water table underneath their fields itself excludes many in the first instance, and high investment and maintenance costs exclude many more from even attempting to adopt this technology. Further, the precarious nature of water table deprives many even after investing in the whole set up of the borewell. Only those who invested in multiple borewells have access to relatively sustained irrigation.

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<sup>74</sup> Expenditure and losses incurred on account of borewells was reported to be one of the major causes of indebtedness and suicides of farmers in the state. Sainath (2004) notes “Borewells loom large in the latest round of farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh. All those who took their lives had run up huge debts. A hefty chunk of this money (borrowed at interest rates of 36 per cent and above) was spent on borewells. Just 12 households that have suffered suicides recently had invested in 52 of them. All but four or five failed. They had spent close to Rs. 8 lakhs on these”. He describes an extreme case of Musampally village in south Telangana: “This village in Nalgonda district has barely 2000 acres under cultivation. But it boasts over 6,000 borewells - two to every human being. Over 85 per cent of these wells have failed. The rest are in decline” (Sainath, 2004).

**Table 4.5:** Net Area Irrigated from Different Sources of Irrigation and Gross Area Irrigated in Mahbubnagar district from the years 1955-56 to 2006-07 (Area in '000 Hectares)

Year	Project Canals	Tanks	Tube Wells	Other Wells	Other Sources	Net Area Irrigated	Area Irrigated More than Once
55-56	6	68	0	17	3	93	9
60-61	8	52	0	22	3	85	7
65-66	11	64	0	26	4	105	15
1970-71	22	58	0	26	3	109	28
1975-76	23	61	0	33	6	122	37
1980-01	24	47	Negligible	51	4	127	33
1985-86	24	10	1	44	2	79	26
1990-91	20	43	5	89	3	159	38
1995-96	10	17	44	51	5	127	34
2000-01	18	18	106	40	6	188	47
2005-06	21	11	111	18	6	167	44
2006-07	21	1	118	10	7	157	38

Year	Gross Area Irrigated	Net Sown Area	Gross Sown Area	Total Fallows (Current & Other)
55-56	103	1010	1020	211
60-61	92	910	919	328
65-66	119	905	925	352
1970-71	137	1053	1090	189
1975-76	159	961	1004	298
1980-01	160	920	959	343
1985-86	104	-	-	-
1990-91	198	884	953	506
1995-96	161	746	786	650
2000-01	235	920	997	-
<b>2005-06</b>	211	<b>777</b>	<b>786</b>	-
<b>2006-07</b>	195	-	-	-

Computed from the source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Andhra Pradesh, [www.indiastat.com](http://www.indiastat.com)

**Table 4.6:** Community-wise households possessing borewells and land under tank in Chennaram village

Community	No.of HHs	Land owning households	HHs owning borewells	Area under borewells	HHs owning land under tank	Area under tank	HHs with uncultivated land
SC	67	66	8	11	40	19	10
ST	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	97	94	31	35	57	40	21
OC	65	62	44	109	34	56	11
Total	230	223	83	155	131	115	42

**Table 4.7:** Land size-class-wise households possessing borewells and land under tank in Chennaram village.

Community	Marginal		Small		Semi-medium		Medium		Large	
	Bore well	Tank	Bore well	Tank	Borewell	Tank	Bore well	Tank	Borewell	Tank
SC	3	28	3	11	2	1	-	-	-	-
ST	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OBC	18	21	8	23	4	11	1	2	-	-
OC	2	2	10	4	18	15	12	11	2	2
Total	21	51	21	38	24	27	13	13	2	2

Note: Households are categorised based on the size of landholding as large, medium, semi-medium, small and marginal which are also categories employed by the government to categorise operational landholdings

**Table 4.8:** Caste wise households which own land (in acres) under tank in Chennaram

Community	Upto 0.5	0.6-1.0	1.1-1.5	1.6-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	Total
SC	33	3	2	2	0	0	40
ST	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	38	12	4	1	1	1	57
OC	12	5	4	3	6	4	34
Total	82	20	10	6	7	5	130

**Table 4.9:** Caste wise households which had access to water in the past, under tank, but presently do not have access to water under any source in Chennaram

Community	SC	OBC	OC	Total
Households	39	48	13	100

**Table 4.10:** No. of households possessing land irrigated under borewell in Chennaram

Community	Upto 0.5	0.6-1.0	1.1-1.5	1.6-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4.0	4.1-5.0	5.1-6.0
SC	3	2	1	1	0	1	0	0
ST	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	12	4	7	3	1	0	1	0
OC	4	8	4	8	6	9	3	1
Total	19	14	12	12	7	10	4	1

**Table 4.11:** Households with wet land (under borewell and tank), classified under the official land-size categories (based on total land) in Chennarams

Comm-unity	Marginal		Small		Semi-medium		Medium		Large	
	Borewell	Tank	Borewell	Tank	Borewell	Tank	Borewell	Tank	Borewell	Tank
SC	3	28	3	11	2	1	-	-	-	-
ST	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OBC	16	21	8	23	4	11	1	2	-	-
OC	2	2	2	4	18	15	12	11	2	2
Total	21	51	21	38	24	27	13	13	2	2

**Table 4.12:** Caste-wise total area (in acres) under borewells and tank in Chennaram

Community	No. of HHs with borewells	Total Area	Tank	Total Area
SC	8	11	40	19
ST	0	0	0	0.00
OBC	31	35	57	40
OC	44	109	34	56
Total	83	155	131	115

**Table 4.13:** Number of borewells and dug wells, functioning and failed in Chennaram

Comm-unity	Individually owned	In partnership	Total no. of borewells	Total no. of borewells failed	Dug wells (dried)
SC	3	2	5	9	2
ST	0	0	0	0	0
OBC	9	8	17	19	8
OC	18	13	31	66	12
Total	30	23	53	94	22

### 4.3.1 Cropping pattern and Shifts: Class specificities

Paddy and groundnut are the major crops cultivated presently under irrigation in this village. Castor is the major rainfed crop followed by jowar (sorghum), red gram, green gram and black gram. A few households have started cultivating cotton and horticultural crops like citrus, mango and vegetables since a few years before the field study. The major shift that happened in the last two decades is from jowar towards castor and paddy. The shift is the same for the district as well. The major crop grown in the district is now castor followed by jowar, while until the turn of the millennium the latter occupied the largest area cultivated followed by the former.

Castor had been traditionally grown in this district during the *kharif* season. The state of Andhra Pradesh is the third-largest cultivator of castor in India (the other two being Gujarat and Rajasthan). India is highest castor producing and exporting country in the world followed by China and Brazil. More than 60% of the state's castor production is contributed by Mahbubnagar; the remaining is largely contributed by the adjacent Nalgonda district. Paddy is the third major crop which saw a 40% increase in the cultivated area. The shift towards paddy was largely between 1970 and 1990 when there was an increase of well (openwells) irrigation. This tendency continued more vigorously after 1990 with borewell irrigation, but the total area under paddy did not increase at the same pace as it had since 1970, because the other sources of irrigation had declined sharply, as discussed above.

An important dimension of this cropping pattern, however, is the significant variation across sections of cultivators. Not only was land unequally distributed among households but the crops grown and the returns from the respective crops on the available quality of soil exhibits even more disparity than the distribution of land. One may be able to see such cropping patterns exhibited by size-class of operational holdings at regional level through NSSO's unit level data. But the reports published by this organisation clubs all cereals into one category and, thus, does not reveal the differences in the crop pattern *vis-a-vis* size-class of holdings with regard to crops like paddy on the one hand and 'coarse' grains like jowar on the other. A closer look in the field area suggests that crops that require higher investments that yield higher returns are concentrated in favour of the larger holdings of land. It is quite obvious, for instance, paddy that requires irrigation is concentrated among those who have access

to irrigation. As already shown, 70% of the irrigated area at present is under the OCs and most of it is with those who own medium and large size holdings. In other words, those who do not have access to irrigation and who are not in a position to create irrigation facility are restricted to rainfed crops. Paddy, groundnut (during the *rabi* season) and horticultural crops are largely produced by the cultivators holding substantial sizes of land.

Horticultural crops are encouraged and supported by the government in view of rising concerns over monoculture and groundwater depletion. Under the National Horticultural Mission drip irrigation system sanctioned for to those who already have irrigation facilities along with saplings and sufficient funds for plantation. This mission actually targeted small and marginal farmers. But one would notice that of these horticultural crops were grown by the upper strata of cultivators in this village and in neighbouring villages as well.<sup>75</sup> There are two reasons for this tendency.

One, the small and marginal farmers in general lack irrigation facilities or the extent of irrigated land may be too small. Furthermore, horticultural crops like citrus and mango, promoted under this scheme, need at least three years of gestation before realising returns. It is possible to cultivate other rainfed crops or crops that require less intense irrigation in the same field but may not yield as much compared to the same crops cultivated in open fields or paddy with intensive irrigation. Two, it is through lobbying and influence that large farmers manage to benefit from this scheme. In certain cases, officials proactively encourage these farmers to avail this scheme by conveniently manipulating guidelines specified for the targeted groups solely to meet stipulated targets.

There is, however, continuous effort by the marginal and small cultivators too to shift to crops that are lucrative.

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<sup>75</sup> To cite some statistics for the unevenness of implementation of such schemes within sections of population, the number of beneficiaries under the Horticulture Programme (2006-2007) in the district to cultivate sweet orange, mango and other fruits was 5,358 - of which, 15.5% were SCs, 7.7% were STs, 34.3% were BCs and 40.8% were OCs (Govt. of AP, 2008: Table 23.24). The amount of subsidy and the extent of area undertaken by the beneficiaries in these respective sections are not provided, which could reflect similar levels of disparity between the different sections of beneficiaries.

#### 4.4.1. The state of dryland agriculture

Studies on agriculture and agrarian relations after the introduction of ‘green revolution’<sup>76</sup> technology in India focused on the impact of agricultural policy and technology on different agro-climatic regions and sections of the population engaged in agriculture. The earlier studies on the impact of the ‘green revolution’ have mostly been critical of the impact of green revolution technology emphasising concerns over increasing disparity between the rich and the poor (Baker and Jewitt, 2007)<sup>77</sup>. Even after the spread of the technology to regions and sections more widely in the later period the conclusions on its impact were varied with regard to the question of distributional consequences.

B.H Farmer reviewed vast literature dealing with this problem and points out that varied views stem from varied ‘perspectives’ of the scholars and the ‘great variety of natural and social environments’ in which the villages in the subcontinent are located (Farmer, 1986:190). Broadly there were two perspectives: one emphasising on the productivity growth and the ‘trickle-down effect’ of its benefits; the other underlining the fact that even though the new technology was ‘scale neutral’<sup>78</sup>, it was ‘not resource neutral’. The latter insist that it adversely affected the lower sections of

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<sup>76</sup> In brief, in Wolf Ladejinsky’s (one of earliest critiques of green revolution) words “ the green revolution stands for producing more food and other agricultural products from less land. The key is modernisation of traditional agriculture and this calls for a new package of practices made up of the following: high-yielding varieties, improved farm equipment, substantial inputs of chemical fertilisers and insecticides, which in turn require the indispensable assured supplies of water at specified intervals. To complete the package, other essential items are also required, chief among them being investment capital and production credit, better research and extension services, seed multiplication and processing, stable prices and incentives, and the necessary institutional support for all these. It is the combination of all these factors that is generally equated with agricultural modernization” (1973:A-133).

<sup>77</sup> See for example Ladejinsky, 1969, 1973; Byres, 1981, 1983; Dasgupta, 1977; Gough, 1977; Mencher, 1978. Given the immediate objectives and the framework of the ‘the new agricultural strategy’ of 1965, Dasgupta notes the rationale behind this ‘selective approach’: “ given the limitations of supply of modern inputs, these should reach those areas and people who are likely to make their most optimum use” (Dasgupta, 1977: 247). Ladejinsky observed that it was “highly selective in its spread-effects” and has “exacerbated the already difficult rural inequity issues” (Ladejinsky, 1973: A-135).

<sup>78</sup> On ‘scale neutrality’ of ‘green revolution’, Dhanagare notes, “[i]nitially the green revolution measures were considered (to) be ‘scale-neutral’. It was therefore, expected that whether it is HYV seeds, pesticides, insecticides and fertilisers, or whether it is lift irrigation, mechanisation of farm operations and other farm subsidies, small landholders would benefit as much as larger landowners would, if not more. The agricultural development bureaucracy working at the grassroots, however, has had different perceptions. Their understanding rarely conformed to the notion of scale-neutrality and their actions almost always reflected a tacit pro-rich policy of rural development” (Dhanagare, 1987:AN-138).

cultivators, and labourers<sup>79</sup>. The disparity in outcomes was acknowledged by even those, like Farmer, subscribes to the “Middle Way”, “between the views from various parts of the ideological spectrum”. He summarises what he claims were “actually happening” based on studies with a ‘welfare perspectives’ (ibid:189,192). There was “a wider, but still differential spread of gains: large farmers benefit more than smaller and poorer farmers and landless labourers benefit to some extent, but often a great deal less than cultivators, so the income gap widens” (ibid).

By late 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, it was acknowledged that the ‘green revolution’ brought about both direct and indirect benefits in spite of distributive limitations in incomes. The major one had being the substantial increase in foodgrain production, which enabled stability of food prices (Hazell and Ramasamy, 1991)<sup>80</sup>. The potential of indirect benefits to rural households resulting from the linkage effects of the ‘green revolution’ on the expansion of the rural non-farm economy in the long run was said to be overlooked (ibid). It was argued that agricultural growth generates gains for the rural poor due to labour-intensive and income-earning opportunities arising in the rural non-farm economy. Hazell and Ramasamy from their study of North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu, conclude that “although the indirect effects of agricultural growth are unlikely to improve the relative distribution of income within rural areas, they can still have wide-reaching effects in alleviating absolute poverty” (ibid:3).

The above observations mostly pertain to the regions that witnessed substantial increases in production, particularly of wheat and rice, with the adoption

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<sup>79</sup> See Farmer, 1986 and Dhanagare, 1987,1998 for a review of studies on the socioeconomic impact of ‘green revolution’ in India. Farmer broadly groups those social scientists who adopt a ‘technocratic’ perspective as ‘neo-classical’: they hold “the notion that it is sufficient to increase production in the national aggregate... given sufficient growth in agricultural production, all will be well” (Farmer, 1986:186). He remarks these and other ‘productionist social scientists’ ‘fail to perceive rural poverty’ (ibid: 187). On the other extreme, he summarises the views of some of the Marxian scholars as follows: “the ‘Green Revolution’ as having led in a classical Marxist manner to a widening gap between the ‘rich peasants’ and other classes, and thus to the differentiation of the peasantry, a polarization of society, and (through increasing impoverishment and the loss of land on the part of ‘poor peasants’) growing landlessness and the ‘pauperization’ of the lower classes, including dispossessed tenants” (ibid:188).

<sup>80</sup> Control over food prices was achieved through a broader state-directed strategy. Utsa Patnaik notes, Indian state after independence up to mid 1980s followed state-directed strategy of agricultural development and protection of domestic agriculture through quantitative restrictions on imports and exports. One of the achievements of this strategy is the trebling of food grain production by the mid-eighties. Further, as a result of establishing public procurement and distribution systems and maintaining buffer stocks, the price fluctuations were controlled both for producers and consumers (Patnaik, 2000:xix-xxi).

of the High Yielding Variety (HYV) technology. HYVs in rice and wheat were not uniformly successful in increasing yields across the regions where they were adopted due to physiographic reasons like flooding levels, the extent of sun for photosynthesis, etc<sup>81</sup>. While these variations pertained to irrigated regions, dry regions producing rainfed crops lagged behind.<sup>82</sup> Thus, after two decades of its implementation, Farmer (1986:187) concludes, “‘Green Revolution’ has increased inter-regional disparities, not only in agricultural production but also in prosperity: for prosperity is for people, not regions in the geographical abstract: and people in unaffected, or little affected areas do not, any of them, gather or even glean these fruits, or at best do so to a very limited extent”. He, however, notes that the ‘new technology’ was “still spreading to new areas” (ibid: 178).

Dryland/rainfed agriculture was considered to be ‘historically neglected’ by the State (Harris, 1983)<sup>83</sup>. ‘Dryland blindness’ and ‘bias’ towards areas with assured irrigation by planners and governments accompanied by lobbies of well-off farmers from irrigated regions to increase support for ‘superior’ cereals and other irrigated crops have further contributed to the neglect of rainfed crops. The very terminology used to refer to dryland crops like ‘inferior’ crops, ‘backward’ crops and ‘coarse’ grains also reflects this bias. In response to such bias and neglect, scholars, however, in their concerns for dryland economy until the 1980s underscored the distinction between rainfed/dryland cultivation and irrigated/wetland agriculture and accordingly the distinction between such regions.

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<sup>81</sup> In the case of wheat, Farmer observes, “the spectacular increases in production in the early years of the ‘Green Revolution’ were almost entirely a matter of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh (UP); but more recently the HYVs have spread down the Gangetic plain to eastern UP and Bihar and even into Bengal” (Farmer, 1986:177). In case of rice, it “has been most successful in areas with irrigation and with a sunny season to maximize photosynthesis” like in Punjab and adjacent regions in kharif, in West Bengal during the dry season and in South India. “It has been least successful in Kharif over vast areas of the lower Ganges and Brahmaputra plains and deltas and in similar physiographic environments in eastern India in the same season...In such areas deep flooding, pests and diseases and other factors are hostile to the HYVs” (ibid:177-8).

<sup>82</sup> See Bhalla, 1983 for the spread of new technology, regional growth in production in comparison with respective growth in workforce, and accentuation of inter-regional inequalities.

<sup>83</sup> A section of scholars paid special attention to the concerns of rainfed cultivation and dryland economy in India. N.S. Jodha, M.V. Nadkarni, Barbara Harris, V.M. Rao, R.S. Deshpande, and several others have focused on specificities and challenges in rainfed farming, technology and productivity growth, exchange relations, poverty and underdevelopment in dryland regions.

The introduction of ‘neo-liberal economic reforms’ in the 1990s drew attention away from “scholarly concerns about agrarian transformation”<sup>84</sup>. It predominantly shifted attention to the ‘crisis’ (‘neo-liberal crisis’) in Indian agriculture, where agriculture was seen as a “sector” needing state intervention, ignoring the “dynamics of changing caste and class relations on the ground” (Jodhka, 2012:5). Further, such an approach, barring a few exceptions, also overlooked the specificities of rainfed and irrigated agriculture. If the ‘new crisis’ was general to both kinds of agriculture, rainfed agriculture suffered most because of the already existing unevenness, and discrimination against it by the State. One could think of possible reasons for overlooking class and regional distinctions by those concerned with the ‘agrarian crisis’. One, there has been a spread of irrigation, mostly groundwater irrigation, and cultivation of high-yielding/hybrid/high-value irrigated crops even in regions which were/are predominantly engaged in rainfed cultivation<sup>85</sup>. With shift in technology and crops, these regions started exhibiting growth rates in production higher than the green revolution belts where growth levels started declining<sup>86</sup>. Two, by the turn of the millennium Indian agriculture had emerged as ‘small farmer economy’ with more than four fifths of cultivators being small and marginal (Reddy and Mishra, 2008).

It is argued that the State played an important role in the development of agriculture since the implementation of green revolution – extending technology, input subsidies, credit and remunerative prices – when a major part of cultivation was done by a small section of resource-rich farmers with substantial holdings. Ironically, when the composition of cultivators had witnessed a change predominantly towards those operating small and marginal holdings that needed State support the most, it started withdrawing such support. The implementation of ‘neo-liberal’ agricultural reforms with a ‘free-market’ ideology, thus, shifted the burden of agricultural production largely on to the small and marginal cultivators, leaving them in a volatile

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<sup>84</sup> Harris-White and Janakarajan, 1997:1469; Jodhka, 2012

<sup>85</sup> V.M Rao warned two decades ago that if “irrigation potential is developed, its spatial spread is likely to be uneven leaving many areas out of its benefits. In the absence of a new dryland technology, the spread of irrigation is likely to further darken the shadow of underdevelopment it casts on the left-out areas” (Rao, VM, 1991:A-9). In case of groundwater irrigation, it did cast such a shadow on the lower strata of cultivators who could not afford to invest in borewells.

<sup>86</sup> See Rao, V.M, 1991; Ninan and Chandrashekar, 1993; Vakulabharanam, 2005; Rao, K.P.C, 2008

situation when the cost of production had drastically increased<sup>87</sup>. Reddy and Mishra (2008) while addressing the ‘agrarian crisis’ in general in the context of ‘neo-liberal’ reforms, however, largely point out aspects that pertain to specific classes, ‘small-marginal’, and regions, dry regions which started pursuing high-value crops with groundwater irrigation.

Looking at Mahbubnagar, it is evident that there is a regional and class dimension to this ‘crisis’ which has its roots in State policy. Here, it is considered a symptom of semi-arid, semi-irrigated agriculture, with its characteristics persisting for the last two decades rather than a transient ‘crisis’. It was well documented that low priority was given to dryland agriculture in public spending, the bulk of which had gone towards large irrigation projects and the bulk of credit and subsidies for inputs had gone to benefit the irrigated regions. Yet rainfed crops exhibited growth in productivity comparable with irrigated crops. Nadkarni examines growth rates of foodgrains between 1950-51 and 1984-85 and remarks, “the disadvantages affecting coarse cereals have not prevented their growers from taking steps to increase their yields... Neither their ‘inferior-good’ status nor their ‘subsistence crops’ character has come in the way of maintaining a growth rate in yields almost close to that of foodgrains as a whole, and better than in the case of rice” (Nadkarni, 1986:A-114).<sup>88</sup> Yet there had been a decline in the cultivated area of these crops particularly during the post-green-revolution period when they witnessed higher yields. It was “diverted to other crops with the introduction of irrigation” (ibid). The declining trend in the area under these crops became even more drastic during the so-called ‘crisis’ period from the 1990s.

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<sup>87</sup> See Reddy and Mishra, 2010; “[J]ust at a time when the small-marginal peasantry needed to find its feet in high productivity agriculture, there have emerged a number of technological, resource-related and institutional changes” (Reddy and Mishra, 2010:48). It is pointed out that institutional sources of credit and other inputs have been on the ‘decline’ as result of ‘neo-liberal reforms’ forcing this section of cultivators to depend on ‘unregulated’ sources, resulting in their indebtedness and also suicides (ibid:49). Instead of strengthening research and extension support for a sustainable and profitable agriculture, there has been, for example, ‘privatisation’ of development of hybrid seeds leading to increased dependence on market for seed (ibid: 50). Paucity of public investment in irrigation forced private investment in ground water irrigation resulting in over-exploitation of groundwater and unsustainable practices of agriculture. With a shift in technology and cropping patterns, there has been a steep rise in the cost of production (ibid:49).

<sup>88</sup> Growth in yields during 1970-71 to 1984-85 (the post-green-revolution period) “was actually more impressive in these lowly cereals than in the case of rice, in spite of higher expenditure on the latter” (Nadkarni, 1986:A-114).

In the Telangana region, the major shifts that happened in cropping pattern were the increase of paddy and cotton accompanied by a drastic decrease of jowar. Of the total cropped area during the late 1950s, paddy occupied 14.1% in south Telangana and 20.8% in north Telangana (Subramanyam, 2002). By 2006-07 it has increased to 24.7% in south Telangana and 34.2% in north Telangana<sup>89</sup>. The share of cotton in the total cropped area increased between the late 1950s to the late 1990s from 0.4% to 8.2% in south Telangana and from 4.0% to 14% in north Telangana (ibid).<sup>90</sup> This was accompanied by a decrease in of cropped area of jowar from 26.7% to about 8% in south Telangana and from 31% to about 4% in north Telangana (ibid). This shift in itself suggests that the crops from which cultivators have been moving away are not commercially favourable. This unfavourable nature is not an inevitable characteristic of the rainfed crops but has much to do with State policy.

Nadkarni (1986) has shown that the problem with rainfed crops like 'coarse' cereals and pulses was not the lower rate of returns on investments but that the absolute returns per hectare are lower for these crops than for irrigated crops. This is because the quantum of yield is very high for the latter crops compared to the former. This low yield for rainfed crops, he argues, was not a "permanent constraint" but that the "real" constraint was technological and institutional (ibid: A-113).<sup>91</sup> The other reason for the low returns on rainfed crops was due to unregulated market conditions and the lower/unstable prices for farm produce. Whereas it is observed, that markets are better organised in the case of rice and wheat, and further, large-scale procurement through Food Corporation of India (FCI) for these grains at a Minimum Support Price (MSP) act as "countervailing power to private traders"(ibid).

The Price Policy of the state for agricultural commodities, which was implemented since the late 1960s was effective particularly in case of rice and wheat

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<sup>89</sup> Computed from data available with the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of AP

<sup>90</sup> It may be noted that cotton is largely cultivated under rainfed conditions in this region. In the state as a whole about 80% of it is cultivated under rain fed conditions. According to, Fertiliser Association of India, 19.1% of the area under cotton was irrigated in 2007-2008 ( Directorate of Economics and Statistics, AP, andhrapradeeshstat.com)

<sup>91</sup> Nadkarni points out some constraints: "low allocation to research and extension in the case of dry farming" (Nadkarni, 1989: 2832), "the failure to evolve a wide range of new varieties adapted to an equally wide range of climatic and cropping patterns", lack of an "overall strategy of dryland development" to improve yields, among others (Nadkarni, 1986: A-115-7).

because of procurement through state agencies at the (MSP).<sup>92</sup> ‘Coarse’ cereals like jowar and from mid-1980s, pulses too were included under the list of crops for which the government sets the MSP. But because the price set was low compared to private market prices and procurement was not done by the State, fixing MSP did not help these crops. When the market prices are higher than the prescribed MSP, the State need not procure these grains nor is it obligated to compensate the differential price between the MSP and the market prices. The State could avoid the burden of procuring or supporting these crops as long as it kept the MSP for the same lower than the market prices. Yet in the case of irrigated crops like paddy and wheat, the state continued to procure these foodgrain even when the market prices were higher than the MSP (Deshpande, 2008) to stock up for the Public Distribution System (PDS). What is significant, however, is even though the market prices were much higher than the MSP in case of jowar, the area under this crop had continued to decrease. This only reflects that the market price was far from remunerative for this crop, and MSP was even worse. This decline was also true in the case of pulses, but to a lesser extent, because of instability of their prices although pulses were consumed across sections of population and regions even where it is not produced.

The decline in these crops, therefore, was not an inevitable consequence of commercialisation and/or changing food habits. In fact, the change in food habit from jowar to rice is largely due to State policy that procured rice and wheat at support prices and supplied the same at subsidised prices through the PDS<sup>93</sup>. These measures

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<sup>92</sup> As part of institutional reforms to strengthen agricultural production and to evolve a price policy for agricultural commodities, Agricultural Prices Commission was constituted in 1965 to advise the Government, with an aim at “evolving a balanced and integrated price structure in the perspective of the overall needs of the economy and with due regard to the interests of the producer and the consumer” (GOI, 1965 cited in Deshpande and Naika, 2002: 24). This was to facilitate minimum support prices for agricultural commodities, as one of the instruments of price policy. The two other major instruments were procurement and public distribution system.

<sup>93</sup> K.P.C Rao concludes the same: “The ‘green revolution’ technologies introduced in the 1960s were mostly suitable for rice and wheat. These two crops also received favourable minimum support prices (MSP), backed up by procurement wherever needed. This kind of procurement support was lacking for rainfed cereals such as sorghum, millet and other coarse grains. The public distribution system through which food grains are supplied at 50% of the economic cost is also focused on rice and wheat. This has hastened the substitution of coarse grains by rice and wheat in the consumption basket of the rural people. As a result, the demand for coarse grains dropped and caused a fall in their relative prices. This kind of policy support in favour of superior cereals, rice and wheat has rendered the cultivation of coarse grains such as sorghum and millet non-viable. The heavy incidence of production subsidies in favour of irrigated crops has adversely affected the viability of all rainfed crops. The policy distortions at the macro-level have affected the viability of rainfed crop enterprises at the micro-level, leading to rapid shifts in cropping patterns”(Rao, K.P.C, 2008: 569-70).

by the State at attaining food security majorly through rice and wheat witnessed ‘new farmers’ movements’ by farmers in irrigated areas to hike support prices and subsidies for these crops.<sup>94</sup> State-directed agricultural development accompanied by political lobbying furthered the disparity between irrigated and rainfed farming. Such discrimination continues even today. For example, in the year 2007 when the MSP for wheat was hiked by Rs.250 (per quintal) in view of a shortage of wheat stocks, there was a demand for an increase of MSP for paddy as well especially from Andhra Pradesh. Parity in MSP for only paddy with that of wheat became an issue, with farmers’ organisations and political parties in the opposition agitating, but not for a proportionate hike in MSP for rainfed crops. MSP for paddy was hiked disproportionately compared to other crops.<sup>95</sup> This was not because of any shortage of food stock or due to a fall in area under this crop, but in view of the continuous demand for increase in MSP of paddy before general elections (2009). Such a hike, however, was not extended to any dryland crop, notwithstanding a steep reduction in the area of cultivation. Only with the recent shortage of grams the government has increased MSP of pulses. For instance, it raised the MSP of red gram in 2010-11 by Rs.700, although the CACP’s recommended increase for the same was less than half

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<sup>94</sup> The initial phase of ‘agrarian strategy’ in post-Independent India with its emphasis on land reforms benefited the large and middle peasantry. The second phase, New Agricultural Strategy, which shifted its focus to productivity and growth with green revolution package of technology, subsidies and price incentives further benefited these classes of peasants (see Rao, JM, 1998, Pandey, 1994). The state with its various organs and institutions provided the needed subsidies, protection, credit and marketing support especially to crops which became important components of food security. The latter peasant classes, which became the “hybrid ruling elite” of villages as the “clientele” of the ‘welfare state’, “learned the language of market and acquired the power to sustain the ‘subsidy’-a freedom coupled with benefits from the state” and this in turn sustained the state’s political legitimacy (Pandey, 1994: 868). Balagopal remarks that with the abandoning of the agenda of land reform simultaneously with new issues of subsidies and remunerative prices “a certain objective homogenization of rural rich” has given rise to a formidable class of rural rich unlike the old feudal lords, with a “democratic face that holds up traffic demonstrating en masse for remunerative prices...” (B.K. 1984: 1021) “It is formidable not only because it is numerically larger, organisationally better equipped, and organically placed at the heart rather than the periphery of the Indian Economy, but also because it is a populist class, a class that can pretend (and is very successfully pretending) to be a democratic class, which ensures that the various political parties and ‘public opinion’ can take its’ side with much more passion and much less of inhibition than in the case of the old-type feudal” (ibid:1022).

<sup>95</sup> In 2007-08 Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana were in the forefront demanding hike in MSP of paddy, which neither state governments nor central government could ignore. The AP state cabinet in October, 2007 deliberated at length on the “burning issue” of MSP for paddy and “its political fallout”. It was reported that three ministers from coastal Andhra argued that a “majority of the paddy farmers are from the coastal belt and disregarding their demand would mean inviting trouble” (Narendra, Ch., 2007: “Andhra government in political crisis on support price for paddy”, [www.mynews.com](http://www.mynews.com), 25 October). The state government of AP, not surprisingly, conceded to the demand even before the centre announced a hike.

of what the government increased. The criteria adopted to fix the MSP by the CACP or its recommendations are set aside when there is a shortfall in food stocks or political mobilisation for increase of MSP or when there is an absence of both. Deshpande, based on his study of the impact of MSP on the agricultural economy, notes that the policy of MSP “vitiating the inter-crop price parity and the policy became instrumental to such a policy of deliberate policy neglect, and indirectly discouraged certain crops and crop groups through relative prices” (Deshpande, 2008: 103). “The cropping pattern acted as a conduit to transfer this effect of inequality across regions and farmer groups. Largely the crops, which received raw deal in terms of relative prices were the ones grown by resource poor farmers and in slow growth regions” (ibid).<sup>96</sup>

Given this situation the cultivators in this region opted to shift mainly towards cotton and paddy. This was because, in the case of cotton, it was the only crop having a ‘new dryland technology’ that appeared to perform better compared to ‘irrigated technology’ by the late 1980s (Rao,V.M, 1991). While in the case of paddy, it appeared to provide assured returns if one had resources to invest in groundwater irrigation (Alary, 1999). Cotton, however, witnessed high yield fluctuations in this region due to rainfall uncertainties as it was largely cultivated under rainfed conditions. Parthasarathi and Shameem (1998) observe that the high rate of investment for inputs, especially for pesticides, dependence on moneylenders for credit, accompanied by year-to-year fluctuations in yields and prices for produce have resulted in deep distress for cotton farmers. Such distress was believed to be the cause of unprecedented suicides of cotton farmers in this region (particularly Warangal district) during the late 1990s. Price fluctuation for cotton was also said to be the result of the neo-liberal policy that involved removal of quantitative restrictions on imports of agricultural commodities. Trade liberalisation also affected oilseed

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<sup>96</sup> For a review of recent works on the politics of procurement and support price, see Raghavan, M (2004). He points out that existing price policy is irrelevant for many crops and regions/states. “In short, the flagrant political bias comes out in the open in every aspect of farm price policy: fixation of MSPs, institutional arrangement for their implementation, storage and disposal” (Raghavan, 2004: 508). On political compulsions, he adds, “anything can happen if this kind of procurement and price support is not implemented in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, nothing is going to happen if similar or even an economically rational price policy is not extended to the remaining states” (ibid: 508).

cultivation in this region.<sup>97</sup> Yet cotton cultivation continues despite volatile markets. Both the policy of green revolution and the recent trade liberalisation had a cruel impact on regional lines with respect to cotton cultivation. Rayalaseema, another semi-arid region within this state, was a centre of cotton production during the colonial times. It could not compete with the better-off regions after the advent of green revolution technology with irrigated varieties of HYVs.<sup>98</sup> And, after the cultivators in the region of Telangana shifted to cotton with ‘new dryland technology’, they were soon forced to compete with world market trends due to trade liberalisation.

The shift towards paddy, as noted above, was due to assured incomes. The advantage in its case is both higher yields per unit area and stability of returns relative to other rainfed crops. The uncertainty in yields is minimal because of controlled irrigation compared to rainfed crops. The fluctuation in prices for the produce is also minimal because of the support systems that paddy and wheat enjoyed. Even during the neo-liberal regime, when the cotton prices fell, prices remained stable for rice in India even though the same may have fallen in the world market (Vakulabharanam, 2005). This is because of the support systems for paddy that protect it from market influences<sup>99</sup>. The uncertainty in case of paddy in this region, however, has been because of instances of drying up of borewells due to depletion of the water table and due to shortages in power supply.

Higher productivity of crops like paddy and cotton reduces the threshold of viability of the size of the holding compared to traditional rainfed crops. Against the

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<sup>97</sup> *Human Development Report, 2007*, AP(2008: 71), notes that “groundnut and cotton...have suffered in the state because of trade liberalization”. There was also a decrease of cultivation of oil seeds by more than four percent in the total cropped area in north Telangana where cotton cultivation increased more steeply (ibid).

<sup>98</sup> “[T]he importance of Rayalaseema as a cotton producing region declined sharply after 1965 with the advent of the high-yielding and irrigated varieties of cotton in the other regions of Andhra Pradesh and India... Rayalaseema region enjoyed the advantages of producing mostly dry crops up to the end of 19th century; but could not stand out in the face of commercialisation of agriculture, in the other regions in this century” (M Atchi Reddy and Y Sarojini, 1990 cited in Rao, V.M, 1991: A2-A3).

<sup>99</sup> “In India, rice and wheat bring stable returns as compared to other crops, especially traditional crops such as sorghum. Thus rice provides both a food security as well as economic security” (Alary, 1999: 1404). This is partly due to the support systems in the form of subsidies from the state as well as the central government (ibid).

backdrop of non-remunerative nature of rainfed crops<sup>100</sup> on the one hand and increasing fragmentation of landholdings on the other, cultivators are forced to explore options to maximise returns within the available quantum of land. Given the limited choice, investing in groundwater irrigation in order to pursue intensive cultivation like paddy is considered a gainful option.<sup>101</sup> As groundwater irrigation reached saturation levels, cultivators explored other options under rainfed conditions like cultivating cotton.<sup>102</sup>

This being the regional dimension of the trajectory of change and state of agricultural in this semi-arid region, it has differential implications for classes of cultivators depending on their access to, and ownership of, resources. ‘Growth’ in the context of ‘underdevelopment’ (Rao, V.M, 1991) and ‘distress’ (Vakulabharanam, 2005) has been observed with a shift in cropping patterns and adoption of new technologies in semi-arid regions. Such observations, however, are based on growth rates seen at aggregate levels for regions. It is not clear whether the classes of cultivators that experience ‘growth’ and ‘distress’ are the same and whether all classes experience both.<sup>103</sup> There is no systematic analysis of access to irrigation and

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<sup>100</sup> For example, ICRISAT study in SAT reveals, “[d]espite yield increases by more than 100%, sorghum cultivation has become uneconomical both in kharif and rabi seasons in all the study villages” (Rao, K.P.C, 2008: 569).

<sup>101</sup> Alary notes, “sorghum cultivation would only pauperise the farmer”. “[A]bsence of choice ... dominates the attitude of the farmers in the region of Telangana... presence or absence of a well conditions choice of crops. The moment a farmer can afford a well he takes up rice cultivation (Alary, 1999: pp.1402-1404).

<sup>102</sup> In Aurepalle, one of the two villages (of the six ICRISAT study villages in SAT) in Mahabubnagar district, Rao observes, from 1976 to 2004, “the fibre-yielding cotton crop has gained prominence, occupying more than one-third of the cropped area. Cereals lost area considerably, with their combined share dropping to 28.5% from 49.5%. Sorghum lost nearly one-half of its area... Due to water shortages, even the irrigated cereal, paddy lost its area share significantly. Oilseed, pulses and other crops also suffered erosion in their area shares. Cotton virtually emerged from nowhere and displaced all the major crops in the base year. (p.567)

<sup>103</sup> Vakulabharanam documents evidence to show higher agricultural growth rate in Telangana region compared to national average since the 1990s. He observes higher declines in consumption levels for the small and marginal cultivators relative to that of large farmers in this region during the same period. He broadly assumes similar shifts in cropping pattern across classes. He points out higher burden on “small farmers” that they “have to borrow to be able to compete and survive... since agricultural growth draws on groundwater irrigation” (Vakulabharanam, 2004:1421). He, however, distinguishes “marginal farmers” as those “who usually do not have access to irrigated land”, and “can cultivate only non-food grain crops”, in order to explain “negative area response to prices”- increasing area under non-food grain crops despite decline in “real prices” for the same during the “liberalization period” (Vakulabharanam, 2005:988-989). This may be partly true, but groundwater irrigation materializing for the proportion of “small farmers” could be meager and there is no statistical evidence to suggest otherwise. Furthermore, non-food crops like cotton and castor vary significantly in their input costs and returns, the former most probably cultivated by the resource rich farmers and the latter by the resource poor.

cropping patterns *vis-à-vis* classes of cultivators and the respective outcomes – whether farms operated by cultivators across sections witnessed similar shifts in cropping patterns and growth rates; why and which sections still cultivate crops that have been on the decline or are known to be uneconomical.

In Chennaram, it is clear that access to irrigation and cultivation of crops that require higher investment per unit area like cotton or horticultural crops are mostly concentrated among the households which ‘own’ large (‘large’ and ‘medium’) holdings of land. They belong to the ‘forward’ or ‘other’ caste group (OCs). Not all OCs, however, own large holdings nor cultivate high investment crops. Crops that require low investment and that yield low returns like jowar and castor are concentrated among the households that own small and marginal holdings of land. These households mostly belong to the SCs and OBCs and partly OCs too. The uneconomical nature of rainfed farming has forced some of the cultivators to leave land fallow. Fallow land has increased in the district reflecting unviability of rainfed cultivation. In this village alone, 41 out of 223 landowning households have left a part or whole of their lands fallow, apart from all the households owning land under tank *ayacut* that is left fallow. Despite its unviability, majority of the households continue this ‘self-exploitative’ production activity through unaccounted household labour.

Further, these ‘backward’ crops that entail low or negative returns sustain with investments drawn from non-farm sources. The incomes earned as wages by migrant labour in the non-farm economy form investment capital for rainfed cultivation, be it investing in a borewell or input costs for cultivation of rainfed crops for the majority of small and marginal households. The ‘historic’ role of agriculture, through productive investment of surplus from agriculture, in the development of non-farm sector is reversed in the case of rainfed agriculture.<sup>104</sup> As Harriss-White remarks, “[t]he role of labour is both contradictory and mutually reinforcing. On one hand migrant labour contributes to low-cost non-agricultural production while, on the other

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<sup>104</sup> Harriss-White observes that “the non-farm economy is unavoidably seen as the key to the development of the rural rain-fed economy... Remittances from migration – reverse flows of resources – will increasingly help to sustain rural households’ consumption, smooth incomes, repay debt and cover agricultural inputs”(Harriss-White, 2008: 558).

hand, remittances to rural households return resources to the agricultural economy and subsidize its reproduction” (Harriss-White, 2008:556).<sup>105</sup>

Investment capital was found to be a major constraint in semi-arid regions earlier (Harris, 1983). Now most of the households with small and marginal holdings of land mobilise resources to improve agricultural production through wage earnings from migration. The credit as ‘crop loan’ from banks or from ‘informal’ moneylenders is mostly repaid from remittances from migration rather than from agricultural production. In case of investments in borewells, the source of credit is mostly moneylenders. Despite an improvement in creditworthiness and a slight improvement in capacity to invest in agriculture, the threshold to constraints of rainfed farming is rarely crossed. Borewells and paddy cultivation that showed promise a decade ago now fail to give hope. Therefore, jowar is still cultivated at least for self consumption. Pulses and castor are cultivated as commercial crops under rainfed cultivation. In terms of area of cultivation, jowar and castor are the highest in Mahabubnagar compared to other districts in the state.

Given the households’ economic condition, pulses that contain proteins are seldom preserved for self consumption due to their higher market value. Except a very few households among OCs, most other OCs and other caste groups in the village consume very small quantities of grams, despite growing pulses in their fields.

International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics’ (ICRISAT) two study villages from this district show severe protein malnutrition despite increases in net household incomes. More than half of the households in one village and more than three-fourth of households in another consume less than 50grams of protein per capita per day (Rao, K.P.C, 2008). Castor that had been a traditional crop now emerged as the largest cultivated crop in terms of area, outweighing jowar in the recent years. This may be called the poor man’s commercial crop in dryland regions. It requires low input costs. With new varieties of seed and pesticides available in the market, it is considered less uneconomical compared to jowar. The yields per unit

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<sup>105</sup> Migrant labour contributes to low cost non-farm production because migrant labour’s subsistence costs are subsidized, as their consumption basket is partly substituted by home grown food grains like jowar and rice. Bernstein, drawing from studies in Africa makes the same observation: “It is not only that (typically female) rural ‘subsistence’ production ‘subsidizes’ the wages paid to (typically male) labour migrants, but that remittances and savings from wage employment contribute to the monetary costs of reproducing farming” (Bernstein, 2004:212)

area are, however, very low and the produce price does not compensate low yields. This crop, which forms important component of cultivation for the small and marginal landholding households, deprived of irrigation, is rendered insignificant because of the low returns.<sup>106</sup> Due to the lack of a strong political lobby castor does not even figure in the list of crops for which the Government fixes MSP. In the year 2007 the state government requested the centre to fix MSP for castor but there is no response as yet on this demand.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The objective of this chapter was to document the change and persistence related to important dimensions of the production system, namely, land and agricultural technology. A large proportion of land was concentrated in very few hands till about the 1950s. Compared to earlier generations most of the households own less land. In two lineages it reduced from a couple of hundred acres to a range of a maximum of about 26 acres and a minimum of 1.5 acres. *Reddys*, who had control of a major part of the village land, still control more than half (51.5%) but constitute 28% of the households in the village. Around 60% of them own more than 5 acres of land. On the other extreme, SCs who constitute nearly 30% of the households, own about 16% of the total land. About 72% of them own 'marginal' holdings. OBCs that constitute 43% of the households own nearly 33% of the total land. 46% own marginal landholdings, while 34% own 'small' holdings.

Although dispersal had been a major trend, concentration too occurred with few families, who engaged in own cultivation and buying of land. But soon it got fragmented and also partly transferred to others through sale. A major factor that contributed to fragmentation was division of families. With decreasing mortality rates, most of the families had multiple descendants resulting in multiple inheritance divisions of land. The other significant process that contributed to fragmentation of land, although to a lesser extent, has been transfers through sale. Land changed hands from the predominantly landowning caste of *reddys* mostly to the OBCs and to some extent to the SCs. The magnitude of land that was transacted through sale is still

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<sup>106</sup> In Dokur, one of the ICRISAT study villages in this district, KP.C Rao (2008) observes, "the returns to land and management from castor were negative"(p.569).

meager relative to that of the land owned by *reddys* as a whole. The capacity for the OBCs and SCs to buy land was borne out of non-farm incomes.

Within the OBCs, the traditionally sheep herding caste of *gollas* bought more land. This trend was recognised in the region too. The traditional toddy tapping castes of *gouds*, and the *gollas* started acquiring land when *reddys* started moving into more lucrative economic opportunities in urban centres. In this village, however, *reddys* who have been spending on children's education or girls' marriages or, in general, those who were burdened by unviable agriculture sold land. The OBCs and the SCs that bought land in this village did so through the migrant remittances. The size of land thus bought by these households was very small and did not bring any substantial returns from cultivation. Some of them bought land under the command area of the tank, as it was known for productive agriculture in the past. Such land had been left fallow since the water in the tank has been in short supply for cultivation of paddy in the recent past. Demand for land has been limited and thus the price of land has been so low that some of households could buy land with earnings from manual wage work earned by migrants in the family. But such a process is unlikely to continue in the future. There is no demand yet from outsiders who buy land like in the case of villages closer to urban centres, but the latter trend in the recent years has had a snowballing effect on the prices of land even in interior rural areas.

Inequity in the landholding pattern has reduced mainly because of the decline in large holdings. But this change did not bring about a viable pattern of holdings for a majority of households. About three-quarters of landowning households own only 'small' and 'marginal' holdings. The threshold of viability could not be reduced due to lack of irrigation. Nor is there an improvement in dryland agricultural technology to reduce this threshold. More than three-quarters of these sections have no access to irrigation. The majority of the remaining among these sections have access only to a part of their holdings.

Groundwater technology with deep wells and submersible pumps appeared with a promise of revolution in irrigation technology in the absence of canal irrigation. Groundwater irrigation with openwell technology was well established by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it increased more than fourfold from the 1970s up to 1990 with the adoption of engines powered by diesel initially and electricity later on. This

technology due to its high cost was accessible largely to resource rich families, and therefore, irrigation under openwells was highly inequitable.

The new technology (borewells) in groundwater irrigation which started in the 1980s picked up momentum during the 1990s. Mostly the large farmers adopted this technology initially and, thereby, further increased the land under irrigation. This success seemed a major breakthrough for this dryland agriculture region. Witnessing initial gains, the other sections of cultivators too joined in drilling borewells. Within a decade, irrigation with borewells outweighed other technologies of irrigation— tanks and openwells. The latter sources soon became redundant in the last decade, so much so that the net irrigation declined to levels prevalent, before the adoption of borewells. Irrigation under tanks declined to almost non-use of this source. This shift in irrigation was not similar across sections of cultivators. All of those owning land in the command area of tanks were deprived of tank irrigation. Only a few of them could develop and access borewell irrigation.

In this village 50% and 62% of households with ‘marginal’ holdings and ‘small’ holdings respectively own land under tank. But only 20% and 24% of them respectively have access to borewell irrigation. The remaining landholders have no source of irrigation. Earlier, altogether, 131 households had access to irrigation under the tank (apart from the openwells), but presently only 83 households have access to irrigation only under borewells. This modern technology which was thought to be more equitable compared to the traditional technologies has created higher disparity in irrigation compared to the disparity in landowning pattern – 70% of irrigation was developed and accessed by OC households, 22% by OBCs and 7% by SCs.

The state played an important role in the trajectory of development of agriculture since independence. The state-directed agricultural strategy till the 1980s along with the implementation of green revolution technology (extending technology, input subsidies, credit etc) in order to increase food grain production, also protected domestic producers through quantitative restrictions on imports and exports of agricultural commodities and by procurement of produce at a MSP. ‘Green revolution’ technologies were mostly suitable for irrigated crops like rice and wheat. The objective of productive growth in foodgrain effectively supported irrigated regions and neglected dryland regions.

Despite growth in yields of rainfed crops like 'coarse' cereals and oilseeds, there had been a decline in the cultivation of these crops due to low returns. In the absence of substantial improvements in dryland technology, farmers in dryland regions started shifting to crops like paddy that provided assured returns due to the State's support systems. Cotton with a new dryland technology was the only crop that emerged comparable in yields with that of wet land technology. Thus, due to adoption of these technologies this region witnessed growth rates higher than the 'green belt' areas since the 1990s along with increases in groundwater irrigation and shifts in cropping patterns.

The emergence of unviable landholdings along with non-remunerative nature of rainfed cultivation forced cultivators to shift towards paddy and cotton in this region. The shift to paddy was limited by the saturation levels set by groundwater irrigation. Cotton, however, soon suffered from price fluctuations due to trade liberalisation since the 1990s. Withdrawal from rainfed farming and pursuit of paddy through precarious groundwater irrigation has led to a decline in net sown area and an increase in fallow land.

The net sown area in Mahbubnagar district has come down drastically (26%) from 10.54 lakh hectares in the early 1970s to 7.77 lakh hectares by 2005-06. But, at the same time, the net irrigated area had increased (53%) from 1.09 to 1.67 lakh hectares and the gross irrigated area has increased (54%) from 1.37 to 2.11 lakh hectares. Until the year 2000-01 both the irrigated area and the area of paddy cultivation progressively increased – about 70% increase both in net and gross irrigated area and about 40% increase in the area of paddy cultivation over the early 1970s.

The groundwater crisis aggravated from 2000-01 onwards and both the net and gross irrigated area reduced by 16% and 17% respectively along with a huge decrease in the net sown area by 15.5%. Despite this crisis, 70% of the irrigated land is still occupied by paddy, while the remaining caters to less water-intensive crops like groundnut. The momentum for pursuit of the unsustainable practice of agriculture gathered as dryland crops do not become a sufficient basis for a secure livelihood. Therefore, the entire effort is put on wetland crops like paddy. Cultivators realise that leaving land fallow was less uneconomical than cultivating these crops. In Chennaram

village alone 41 out of 223 landowning households left either a part or all their land uncultivated apart from the land left fallow under the *ayacut* of the tank.

This village study shows that the shift towards paddy which requires irrigation is limited mostly to the upper castes and the large landholding cultivator households. This is also true of the shift to crops like cotton or horticultural that require higher investments. The crops that are considered 'backward' or 'subsistence' crops like jowar, which have been on the decline, are still cultivated by the majority of 'small' and 'marginal' cultivators. In Chennaram and the Mahbubnagar district it is these sections that cultivate the low-cost commercial crop like castor, which has emerged as the largest crop in the recent years. This crop not only yields low per-unit output, but the returns too are low due to market conditions. This crop is not included in the crops that are procured by the state at MSP. Despite such low or negative returns most of these marginal and small cultivators still pursue rainfed farming. The latter sustains largely with household labour and the resources from non-farm incomes in the form of remittances from migrant labourers. In other words, as Barbara Harriss-White (2008) remarks, migrant labour that contributes to low cost non-farm production also subsidises rainfed agriculture.

## Agrarian Change and Classes of Labour

### 5.1.1 Agrarian change, Caste and Class

The vital feature of the production system in ‘traditional’ India was its close association with the caste system (Srinivas, 1996:121-2)<sup>107</sup>. Social anthropologists, based on village studies during the decades of 1950s and 1960s, analysed economic organisation in rural India through the framework of the institution of caste. In other words, division of labour was understood in terms of the caste system. Caste was considered as a system of ‘division of labour’, the “patterning” of which formed the basis of “economic interdependence” (Leach, 1960:5)<sup>108</sup>. It was believed that the organisation of production in the past had been through the interactions of various caste groups involving their specific ‘hereditary occupation’ as articulated in the *jajmani* system. Dumont (1988/2009:97-99) notes, “the division of labour, which forms an integral part of the caste system, may be most clearly understood” in the ‘*jajmani* system’, a term that was commonly applied to “the system corresponding to the prestations and counter-prestations by which the castes as a whole are bound together in the village, and which is more or less universal in India”. These studies during the 50s and 60s, however, found such a system was already disintegrating. The framework of *jajmani* system, as discussed in Chapter-1, did not pave the way for a comprehensive understanding of organisation of agrarian production in India. *Jajmani* system as analysed by scholars involved mainly the interactions and exchanges predominantly between landowning castes on the one side and artisan and the service castes performing hereditary occupations on which they had exclusive rights on the other, including the ritual services of Brahmin castes. But, it excluded in their analysis

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<sup>107</sup>Srinivas emphasised that “the process of production in traditional India cannot be disentangled from the caste system as it operates at the village (or the local) level... In other words, caste system at the village level is locked into the production system and *vice versa*”. This “intimate linkage” between organization of production and caste, according to him, “gives the local caste system a measure of autonomy, insulating it from the consequences of attack on the ideology of caste at the higher levels. ...as long as mode of production remained unaltered, mere ideological attack on the caste system would not change it” (Srinivas, 1996: 121-2).

<sup>108</sup> “[T]he economic interdependence which stems from the patterning of the division of labour which is of a quite special type”, Leach argued, was “[f]ar more fundamental than an analysis of hierarchy and exclusiveness of caste separation” ( Leach: 1960: 5). In contrast with class societies, the caste system, Leach insisted, “is a system of labour division from which the element of competition among the workers has been largely excluded” (ibid).

a very significant and large part of exchanges in the process of agrarian production that occurred between the land owners and the agricultural labourers (Bremner: 1969;1993). Both these occupational categories, one of acquiring ownership of land and cultivating or receiving rent on the same and the other of engaging in manual work on land which is owned by others in return for payments, had not been assigned exclusive rights to any particular castes<sup>109</sup>. In other words, the agrarian system to this extent was, in principle, open to all caste groups. While some castes were traditionally associated with the occupation of cultivation, they had no exclusive rights on this occupation— agriculture as an occupation was ‘caste free’ and ‘religiously neutral’<sup>110</sup>. Caste groups which had exclusive rights on their respective occupation were not restricted from cultivation or agricultural labour<sup>111</sup>. Nor all members of a caste group only engaged in the occupation on which their caste had exclusive rights<sup>112</sup>. Dumont, therefore, remarks, it is a “gratuitous assumption” that “there must have been a time when caste and profession coincided exactly”<sup>113</sup>. Further, certain caste groups predominantly engaged in agricultural labour beside specific tasks associated with their caste<sup>114</sup>. The position of members in agrarian production or the cleavages the

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<sup>109</sup>In fact, the openness of these occupations, particularly acquiring ownership and cultivation of land, gave a certain amount of flexibility in the caste system providing scope for mobility of caste groups in the middle-range of the hierarchy (Srinivas, 1968; 1996).

<sup>110</sup>“[A]griculture is largely considered to be ‘caste free’. There are, no doubt, ‘cultivator castes’... but agriculture is in no sense a caste monopoly, and all castes, down to the very lowest untouchables may practice cultivation... Agriculture may thus be regarded as an ‘open’ occupation which could be and was pursued by any caste irrespective of its ritual status and position in the caste hierarchy”. (Mathur, 1958: 51-52, cited in Gould, 1964:40). Dumont observes that being “more of a kind of occupation than a true profession”, agriculture is a “religiously neutral occupation for the majority of castes (though there is prejudice amongst high castes against using plough in person), and is respectable from non-religious point of view” (Dumont, 1988/2009: 96).

<sup>111</sup>The hierarchy, especially of the ritual, based on the ideology of ritual purity and impurity /pollution in the caste system has prohibited and prevented certain castes, particularly Brahmin castes, from manual work. Holding and using of the plough to till land and certain other manual tasks like hoeing, digging and carrying head loads of earth were considered to be ‘degrading’ (Beteille, 2001). Yet, this did not prevent them from acquiring ownership of land and returns from the same through tenants or employing manual labourers from other caste groups. As Dumont notes “anyone who has direct or indirect access to land – the important point – will see no disadvantage in profiting from it any way open to him” (Dumont, 1988/2009: 96).

<sup>112</sup>Mencher points out that “both today and in the past in much of India, all of the specialized castes taken together (smiths, washermen, barbers, potters, etc.) never constituted more than 10-15% of the total population, and their traditional services alone never sustained them” (Mencher, 1974: 471).

<sup>113</sup> “[T]he link between caste and profession is primarily a matter of status, that the important thing is the hereditary profession provided it is not contradicted by following too inferior a profession, and that the system has probably always carried with it some plasticity of this sort, whilst specialities, ritual or other, constitute its solid core” (Dumont, 1988/2009: 96-97)

<sup>114</sup> For example, Mencher notes, the chamars of north India “though known as leather workers, only a small proportion of the caste members actually do this work, and only a small proportion of their time has traditionally been spent in it, especially in rural areas (Mencher, 1974: 472). “Indeed, in rural areas,

production system entailed were not strictly assigned on the lines of caste but could cut across castes, except artisanal and specialised occupations. This does not, however, mean to suggest that caste had no role in the reproduction of divisions that agrarian production involved. While, on the one hand, ‘open agrarian system’ had been one of the important sources of mobility in the caste system from medieval times (Srinivas, 1996), on the other hand, “the superior economic and political power of the upper castes...kept the lower ones suppressed” (Mencher, 1974: 471). The limits to such mobility in the division of labour were set by resource allocation which ran, in practice, on the lines of caste. The fact that the caste groups at the bottom of the hierarchy had been mostly labourers on land but devoid of control over land in an agrarian economy reveals that the socio-economic system “functioned to keep people separated from one another in a situation in which they were not allowed to own land (or at most, were given a few cents to cultivate)” (ibid: 471)<sup>115</sup>. Thus, the divisions among the rural population based on the organization of production or, in other words, distribution of economic roles, mostly coincided with the stratification of the caste system (Beteille, 1996).

Another aspect within the framework of caste and profession/division of labour that received little attention was the qualitative difference among the ‘dependents’, i.e. between the ‘hereditary professions’ and the agricultural labour in their nature of relation to the ‘dominants’/‘patrons’. Agricultural labour was considered as an ‘economic pseudo-specialisation’ in relation to caste. It was distinguished from ‘religious specializations’ which are considered truly jajmani by Pocock, 1962 (cited in Dumont, 1988/2009:104). Whereas Dumont considered agricultural labour to be more strongly linked to caste and ‘religiously marked’ (ibid:107). The difference is that each family pursuing hereditary-specialisation

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the major function of the large untouchable castes both in the past and today has been to serve as a source of agricultural labor” (ibid: 472).

<sup>115</sup> Dumont recognised, like in the case of specialist castes, a strong link between caste and profession in case of agricultural labour, an economic pseudo specialization in terms of Pocock’s distinction of religious and pseudo- specialisations. For Dumont, though agricultural labourers (referred to as “unfree” workers by Dumont following Daniel and Alice Thorner’s characterization) are not “ritual or ceremonial specialists”, the link between caste and this profession was “religiously marked”. He does not, however, elaborate how and why the link between caste and the profession of ‘unfree’ labour was “strong” and “religiously marked”. Perhaps, this link may be loosely inferred from his observation that “there is prejudice amongst high castes against using plough in person” and that the “unfree workers” were “generally” the “leather people” and “untouchable” (Dumont, 1988/2009:96-106).

usually rendered services to more than one patron family and in some cases only on certain occasions. But the 'unfree worker' and his family was tied to only one patron family and rendered labour service all through the year extending sometimes to generations. The latter is characterised as 'bonded' labour or 'unfree' labour in liberal juridical terms. This is where, Dumont notes, "the personal relationship of dependence is...more marked" than in the other categories of professions (ibid:100). Yet, agricultural labour in general and 'attached labour'/unfree labour' in particular received little attention in discussions on jajmani system or on caste.

The study of economic organization in rural India based on the analysis of interactions between caste groups and the exchanges of goods and services articulated through the *jajmani* system was no more tenable even during the early decades after independence. The socio-economic system in which the production system was traditionally subsumed within caste structure began to change gradually during the British rule and at a higher pace after independence of the country (Srinivas, 1996). This is partly due to several legislations that aimed at democratising economic and political institutions of the village and partly due to the expansion of the money economy, urban employment and demographic changes. The most important offshoot of these changes that has had significant implications for the traditional hold of caste on the agrarian production system was the entry of land into the market (Beteille, 1996). Land owners as a class became more heterogeneous in character in terms of caste than it was in the past (ibid). Fundamental change that occurred in caste in its relation to organization of production is the decline of *jajmani* system and central to this decline is the "growing disjunction between caste and occupation" (Srinivas, 1996:xiv).

If caste was not appropriate or insufficient as a category to understand the economic interactions between individuals and families, then it was difficult to conceive of such interactions in the production system meaningfully without a relevant category. Disjunction between caste and the division of labour, and heterogeneity of caste in terms of ownership of land and labour may entail diverse combinations of caste, land and labour. Further, as recent studies as well as this research reveal that owners/users of land and labour are not mutually exclusive. In

other words, contemporary rural situation opens up possibilities where “infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of labour are possible.” (Lenin, 1960, cited in Bernstein, 2010a:6). “It is necessary”, therefore, “to reduce the diversity of empirical data to a few fundamental categories” through “abstraction” (Beteille, 2001:185). The change in rural society made it imperative among anthropologists for a shift in analytical framework that sought to separate the interactions of different ‘categories’ of people in the process of production from caste system, and further, study the interrelationships between the hierarchy of these ‘categories’ and other hierarchies such as caste and power. Among the anthropologists studying Indian villages, Beteille was the first to employ the concept of class in the early 1960s to study social change in *Sripuram* village in Tamil Nadu<sup>116</sup>. He employed a framework that analytically separated caste system, class system and distribution of power and studied their interrelationships. Caste, class and power constitute separate hierarchies but in reality they are “closely interwoven” and “relate in different ways to the broader phenomenon of social stratification” (Beteille, 1996: 4;186). The hierarchies of caste, class and power overlap to some extent and also cut across each other. His study about five decades ago showed that the cleavages of caste, class and power tended to dissociate from each other, whereas they overlapped more closely in the past (Beteille, 1996).

Class, broadly, is “a category of persons occupying a specific position in the system of production” (ibid:4). Locating classes, however, is not as easy as castes that are groups with names and boundaries. Classes are “categories” that can be treated separately “only by a process of abstraction” (ibid: 185). Drawing from Marx, Beteille, in the context of agrarian social structure of *Sripuram* village, defined classes as “hierarchically arranged social categories, based broadly upon ownership and

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<sup>116</sup>Kathleen Gough studied two villages in the same district in the early 1950s. She too employed the concept of class and analysed caste and class structure of these villages, but at a later point of time (after about thirty years since her initial fieldwork). She studied two villages, *Kumbapettai* and *Kirippur*, in Tanjavur district of Tamil Nadu during the period of 1951 and 1953. After her restudy of these villages in 1976, she re-analysed these villages on Marxian terms “as they were” during the early fifties in her book ‘Rural Society in Southeast India’ (1981). By this time, however, many scholars, particularly economists, started analyzing data- both primary and large-scale survey data- from rural India in terms of class in their analysis of changing agrarian relations after the implementation of ‘green revolution’ technology, which ensued in what is called as ‘mode of production debate’ (see Thorner, 1982 for a review of this debate).

nonownership of the means of production” (ibid:186).<sup>117</sup>In the context of agricultural production, ownership and non-ownership of the means of production is equated essentially to the ownership and non-ownership of land (ibid). Classes are further divided based on the nature of ownership and control of land and the services rendered to the process of production. Beteille argues that divisions in the rural society centering around ownership, control and use of land, other than those of caste, as “perceived by the people themselves” correspond “fairly closely” to class (Beteille, 1974/2007:92).<sup>118</sup>Thus, for Beteille, class system in the context of agrarian economy of *Sripuram* consisted of the basic categories of landowners, tenants and agricultural labourers and the relations between them. Marxian scholars argued that these categories do not constitute classes in Marxist sense.<sup>119</sup>According to Utsa Patnaik the most important indicator of class status related to the criterion of labour use is ‘labour exploitation’, which is closely correlated with the other two criteria, namely, extent of possession of means of production, and achievement of subsistence needs and investible surplus (Patnaik, 1987). Patnaik asserts that “the most important single aspect of the concept of social class is the question of whether a household primarily derives its income from exploiting others, whether it is primarily self-employed, or whether it is itself primarily exploited”<sup>120</sup> (ibid:50). Empirical ‘approximation’ of the analytical concept of class is attained by employing labour-exploitation criterion.

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<sup>117</sup>Similarly, Gough uses the concept of “class” in “Marxian sense” in her study of Tamil Nadu villages. She employs “Lenin’s formulation” that “classes are large groups of people distinguished by the place they occupy in an historically defined system of production, by their relations... *vis a vis* the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and by the modes of obtaining and the importance of the share of the social wealth of which they dispose.” (Gough, 1981: vii)

<sup>118</sup>Beteille notes, “[s]ome social anthropologists have deliberately avoided the analysis of class in their investigations of rural life in India. In their view the distinction into classes does not correspond to divisions in rural society as perceived by the people themselves. They argue that caste rather than class represents the true divisions of this society.” (Beteille, 1974/2007:92).

<sup>119</sup> It is argued that these categories are merely legal-descriptive categories and do not constitute classes in the Marxist sense: “These are merely juridical-descriptive categories and not analytical categories: the fact of owning land, or the fact of cultivating leased-in land, does not by itself define class status in the Marxist sense. What does define class status is whether the producer exploits the labour of others through obtaining profit, rent or other means, or whether he is self-employed or whether he himself is exploited. A ‘landowner’ can belong to any one of several distinct classes in the Marxist sense: he may be a poor peasant, rich peasant, or landlord... Similarly, a tenant can be a poor peasant, rich peasant, or capitalist.” (Patnaik, 1987: 8).

<sup>120</sup> The various forms of exploitation, Patnaik points out, are “exploitation through hiring labour (surplus value appropriation), through leasing out land (rent appropriation), through money-lending (interest appropriation) and trade (appropriation of profit-on-alienation)” (Patnaik, 1987:201). Of these, she adds, the first two are the most important which form the elements of labour-exploitation criterion (ibid).

Thus, classes of landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, small peasants, poor peasants and landless labourers are identified in the sphere of agricultural production based on the extent of employing the labour of others or working for others relative to self-employment (ibid). The purpose of identifying such classes was, on the one hand, to understand the process of ‘class differentiation’ on the lines of the ‘classic’ schema of ‘polar’ differentiation of the peasant classes leading to the formation of a large rural proletariat and an agrarian capitalist class<sup>121</sup>. On the other, it was to identify principal classes and contradictions in rural society in order for the left parties to build class alliances in their praxis. But the trajectory of agrarian transformation in India has not been such a polar class differentiation. Fragmentation and dispersal rather than concentration of land is the dominant trend with persistence of small-scale cultivation (small farms) (Shah and Harriss-White, 2011; Harris, 2013)<sup>122</sup>. Yet, the criterion of labour employment to distinguish households based on the parameters of net hiring-in of labour or net hiring-out of labour or self-employment is relevant. It is useful to differentiate households as wage labourers or employers of labour or self employed and to understand economic segmentation.

For Beteille, however, the purpose in his study of identifying a class system based on the position of individuals in the system of production was to understand the lines on which a village economy is organised, and how and to what extent this is related to structures of caste and power. Basic classes of landowners, tenants and agricultural labourers obtained about half a century ago in Sripuram do not seem

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<sup>121</sup> “Marxist concept of the process of class differentiation is that, under the regime of commodity production, the primarily self-employed peasantry gives rise on the one hand to a rich peasant class that increasingly employs the labour of others and thereby appropriates surplus, and, on the other, a poor peasant class that is increasingly obliged to work for others and is thereby increasingly subjected to exploitation. This process gives rise to the formation of peasant classes. At the two poles of the rural class structure, and more or less distinct from the peasantry, stand the landlord, defined by possession of substantial means of production and non-involvement in any manual labour; and the landless labourer, similarly with no self-employment, for the diametrically opposite reason that he possesses no means of production at all and is obliged to live entirely by selling his labour” (ibid:51). The transformation of agriculture in England, according to Marx, followed a trajectory that is through “the displacement or dispossession of peasant by capitalist farming (called as “the enclosure model”)” (Bernstein, 2003:5). Lenin emphasized on the tendency to class differentiation of peasants, a “fundamental addition” to understanding paths of agrarian change, “identifying the possibility of the dissolution of the peasantry through the formation of distinct classes of agrarian capital and wage labour” (ibid:5). Following Lenin’s analysis of ‘the differentiation of peasantry’ in Russia, Marxist scholars like Patnaik sought to investigate if such differentiation is underway in Indian agrarian relations (see Patnaik, 1987).

<sup>122</sup>Class differentiation of ‘peasants’, Bernstein argues, is “a tendency within capitalism” and, not “an inevitable and uniform empirical trend” (Bernstein, 2003:6).

relevant in the present rural situation. Ownership of land and labour service in agrarian production are no more exclusive criteria based on which persons in the village can be categorised. Firstly, most of the 'owners' of land also engage in wage labour apart from the labour service rendered on their own land. That is most of those who engage in wage labour also are 'owners' of land. Secondly, all those who are considered very much part of the village do not participate in agricultural production alone. Nor agrarian production process and the persons contributing to this process within the village can be separated from the economy that extends beyond the borders of the village. The social classes that village constitutes are not purely agrarian classes nor can the agrarian classes be separated if the social structure of the village as a unit has to be analysed. Basic unit of economic organization is the household. All working members of a household do not participate in the same economic activity. Thus, households do not lend themselves for any simple categorisation based on economic activity. The economy of most of the households are organised with some of their members being part of agricultural production and others being part of non-agricultural economy or a single person involved in more than one activity either simultaneously or seasonally or in a life time. Almost every rural household has links with the wider economy that are significant for its reproduction (Lerche, 2010; Shah and Harriss-White, 2011). As Bernstein points out "non-farm activity and sources of income play an increasing role in the reproduction of households which retain some basis in land and/or farming, to a greater or lesser extent, and/or retain rural residence" (Bernstein, 2010:87). The class system of the village, therefore, has a basis that is a mix of both agrarian and non-agrarian economic activity. A household may have one member mostly hiring out for agricultural wage, another mostly hiring out for wage labour in a distant city and yet another engaged in own-account, small-scale cultivation and/or tending cattle.

Here, firstly, working individuals are categorised based on the activity they are predominantly engaged with during the year of the survey. The possibility and the extent of the individuals moving between these categories, what is called the fluidity of these categories, is also discussed. The relationship of these categories with other social divisions such as caste and gender are analysed. Secondly, households are categorised into various classes based on the extent of possession of land and the

nature of work performed by the members of household. Further, given that the individual members within a household, in many cases, engage in various economic activities, households are categorised based on a rough estimation of whether they are net sellers of labour or hirers of labour or self-employed. Labourer, here, means a person engaged in hiring out his or her labour for payments in cash or kind, with or without possessing any means of production (land), but is a net seller of labour. This labour is not to be understood in the sense of a ‘classic’ wage labourer who is dispossessed of all means of production. It is on the lines of Bernstein’s ‘classes of labour’, that are neither dispossessed of the means of production nor are they in possession of sufficient means to reproduce themselves (Bernstein 2010a).<sup>123</sup> However, in this study I categorise only those land owning households in which major source of income is from wage labour as classes of labour and not all the land owning households that engage in wage labour.

### **5.1.2 Labour inside and outside agriculture**

Table 5.1 presents the economic activity of the working population of the village. The focus in this chapter being on agricultural workers, *viz.* cultivators and agricultural labourers, workers engaged in activities other than agriculture are categorized as non-agricultural workers. This latter category of workers will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Agricultural workers are divided into three categories, *viz.* cultivators, cultivator-cum-wage earners and agricultural labourers.

**1. Cultivators:** These are those workers who are solely engaged in own-account agriculture. They constitute 13% of total workers and 33% of the agricultural workers of the village. They are 4%, 5% and 31% of the total workers among SCs, OBCs and OCs respectively. This composition also reflects distribution of landholdings respectively among these communities. There may be workers other than what is defined here as cultivators in a household. In some cases the head of the household or mostly a male member may be a cultivator but other members in a household may be engaged in wage labour but not *vice versa*. This male member may

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<sup>123</sup>Bernstein terms ‘classes of labour’ to those “which comprise ‘the growing numbers...who now depend - directly *and indirectly* - on the sale of their labour power for their own daily reproduction’... They might not be dispossessed of *all* means of reproducing themselves, but nor do they possess *sufficient* means to reproduce themselves, which marks the limits of their viability as petty commodity producers in farming (‘peasants’) or other branches of activity. (Bernstein, 2010a:4).

have worked as a wage labourer in the past but due to old age and/or considerations of social prestige has chosen not to hire-out himself/herself for wages. The latter is a conscious act that asserts one's dignity and seeks to demonstrate a claim for higher status. The ideal situation, however, is non-engagement in wage labour by any member of the family at least within the village. But when the household economic situation does not afford this ideal condition the head of the household resorts to such work status differentiating one's household in social status from those in which all the members engage in wage labour. This trend is observed among OBCs and SCs with higher number of men as cultivators than women, while there is equal number of cultivators from both genders among OCs.

Except for women cultivators in women headed households, there is clear distinction between men and women cultivators in the nature of work. Men of this category supervise agricultural production as a whole. They involve in market transactions like purchasing inputs, selling the produce and mobilising investment capital from banks, money lenders or from those who owe money. All of them also engage in manual work like ploughing, etc unless they are physically weak or suffering from physical ailments. They play the most prominent part in negotiating and fixing the wage rate for the labourers. Women cultivators, on the other hand, play active role in mobilising female labourers. They put effort in maintaining a long term relationship with women labourers. They monitor hired women labourers and also engage in manual work along with them.

Except a few, women in this category of workers mutually exchange labour between households that belong to a similar social status. They mostly exchange or reciprocate equal number of days of work in each other's farms. In some cases, when one exceeds the number of days worked in other's farm, she is either compensated at a later stage or paid wage that is equal to the wage paid to hired labourers at that time. When asked about the wage received in such cases, they stress the point that it was only for *badulu* (mutual exchange/ in-return), to differentiate themselves from those who engage in wage labour. Mutual exchange of labour occurs across all sections of agricultural workers. Such exchange of labour by women of this category of workers, a prominent trend, has implications for demand for agricultural labour and wages.

It should be noted that 'own-agriculture' that cultivators engage in, need not necessarily involve only owned land (ownership holding). The operated land (operational holding) may also include leased-in land, if any, for cultivation along with own land minus leased-out land, if any. 'Operational holdings' mostly correspond to 'ownership holdings' as the occurrence of tenancy is low in this village. There are no landless tenants, and leased-in land is cultivated alongside own land mostly to increase scale of operation by small and marginal cultivators. Therefore, in this village, the operational holding (operated as a unit by a cultivator or cultivators belonging to a household) corresponds either to solely ownership holding (partly or fully, depending on the extent of it being cultivated) or ownership holding plus leased-in land, but not to purely leased in land.

**2.Cultivator-cum-wage earners:** These are engaged both in self-cultivation as well as agricultural wage work but own cultivation (both in terms of number of days engaged and the income derived from) constitutes a significant part unlike in the next category of workers. They mention own-account cultivation as their major activity and wage labour as subsidiary activity. They give first priority to self-cultivation and when they are left without work in their own fields they engage in wage work. They constitute 12% of the total workers, and 4%, 12% and 20% of the total workers among SCs, OBCs and OCs respectively. Women predominate over men in this category across all communities. In some cases, especially for women, the number of days engaged in wage labour may be more than that of own cultivation. And, it is usually the case that their respective households are net sellers of labour with other household members engaging in non-agricultural wage work. Overall this category of workers not only engage more number of days in agricultural work (together in cultivation and hiring-out labour) but also more number of days in agricultural wage than that of agricultural labourers. The ambiguous nature of this category, as both hiring-in labour and hiring-out labour, not only gives better access to agricultural wage work but has a stagnating effect on agricultural wages with an advantage to the category of cultivators and disadvantage to the category of agricultural labourers.

**3.Agricultural labourers:** These are mainly engaged in agricultural wage work. Except a few, most of them are also engaged in own-account, small-scale

cultivation, which is insignificant in terms of number of days engaged and income derived. They constitute 16% of the total workers. Unlike the size of above categories it increases with decreasing size of landholdings across communities. They are highest among SCs. They constitute 29%, 13% and 4% of the total workers among SCs, OBCs and OCs respectively. Of the total agricultural labourers, the share of SCs, OBCs and OCs is 56%, 38% and 6% respectively. Unlike the category of cultivators where men predominate in numbers among SCs and OBCs, women predominate here, constituting 75% of the total agricultural wage labourers.

Over all, all those engaged in agricultural work either as cultivators or agricultural labourers form 41% (322) of the total work force. Gender wise, the shares of women and men within total agricultural workers are 64% (117) and 36% (205) respectively. Within respective genders, this category of workers constitutes 50% in total women workers and 30% in the total men workers. Community wise, 38% of SCs, 34% of OBCs and 55% of OCs are agricultural workers. Further, there is high disparity within genders in each community in their participation in agricultural work. Only 25% of men among SCs and 26% among OBCs participate in agricultural work, while higher number of men, 44%, participate in agricultural work among OCs of which majority are cultivators. On the other hand, more number of women, 49% among SCs, 43% among OBCs and 64% among OCs, participate in agricultural work compared to men in their respective communities.

The latter two categories, i.e. all those engaged in agricultural wage work irrespective of the magnitude of or the extent of engagement in self-cultivation, together constitute 67% (216) of the total workers (322) engaged in agricultural work. Women predominate in this grouping. They constitute 74% (159) of this group of workers. Community wise, 33% of SCs, 25% of the OBCs and 24% of the OCs belong to this group.

**4.Non-agricultural workers:** All those involved mainly in work other than agriculture are categorised as non-agricultural workers. Some of them may engage in either self-cultivation or agricultural wage labour during peak agricultural season when labour demand is high, but for most of the year they engage in non-agricultural work. Most of these non-agricultural workers are manual wage labourers working in cities. They constitute a majority of the workers of the village. Nearly 60% (473) of

the village workers are engaged in non-agricultural work. It is highest among the OBCs at 66%, followed by the SCs at 62% and lowest among the OCs yet a large share of 45%. Gender wise, the share of women and men in this category of workers is 43% and 57% respectively. Within respective genders, the share of this category of workers is 50% among women and 70% among men. The nature of non-farm work and the degree of heterogeneity in it across social classes is discussed in the differentiation of social classes in this chapter under the sectionsocio-economic classes and in detail in the last chapter on non-farm economic activity.

**Table 5.1:** Activity of the working population of the village

Communi- community	Cultivators (Own account Agricult			Cultivator-cum- agri.labourers(Own Agri+Agri. Wage)			Agricultural labourers (Agri. Wage+ Own Agri			Non-Agri. Worke			Total workers		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
SC&ST	6	4	10(4)	3	7	10(4)	19	50	69(29)	83	64	147(62)	111	125	236
OBC	22	9	31(9)	13	28	41(12)	10	37	47(13)	131	100	231(66)	176	174	350
OC	32	33	65(31)	10	31	41(20)	2	6	8(4)	55	40	95(45)	99	110	209
Total	60	46	106(13)	26	66	92(12)	31	93	124(16)	269	204	473(59)	386	409	795

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages in the total workers in their respective rows.

### 5.1.3 Socioeconomic classes

Individuals in the working-age group are distinguished into cultivators, agricultural labourers and non-agricultural workers. The economic activity (farm and non-farm) and the criteria of self-employment, hiring-in and hiring-out labour provide a relatively less complicated basis for such categorization at the level of individuals. The socio-economic position, however, is largely determined at the level of households given that the household still remains the primary unit of economic organization- ownership of land and other resources, and economic roles are pooled at this level. Therefore, the household as a unit of analysis becomes meaningful to understand socio-economic segmentation in the village.

However, one needs to be attentive to the hierarchy within a household which underlies the roles based on gender and age, and other factors like levels of education and skills. But, at the level of households one cannot replicate the distinctions obtained at the level of individuals, as the types of individuals (economic roles) vary within a household. For example, a household consisting of a person who is a ‘cultivator’ cannot be categorised as cultivator-household because other members in

many cases work for wages within or outside agriculture. The ‘type of household’ identified as ‘cultivator’ based on the criterion of operating land (more than 0.02 Ha) employed in surveys like NSSO may be relevant in other contexts of analysis. Such criterion is not adopted in this study as it would draw most of the households (more than three-quarters) into the category of ‘cultivator’ and would not throw light on the heterogeneity of work/occupations and socio-economic differentiation among these households.

As mentioned above, the households in this village are distinguished into classes based on the criteria of net labour sold or hired or self employed and the extent of ownership of land. Further, the nature of employment – whether the members of a household are involved in manual or other work or mere supervision without engaging in manual work – is considered. In case where a household’s economic position is determined by and/or largely dependent on employment of a single person in a household, then the household class position is delineated here based on the nature of the latter’s employment– for example, a household in which a member is salaried in a government organisation is considered as ‘salaried’ household irrespective of others’ working status.

**Table.5.2:** Class categorisation of households

Class Caste	Worker (Classes of labour)			Farmer		Supervisory/ Rentier	Salaried		Non-Agri. Self Employed
	I	II	III	IVa	IVb	V	VIa	VIb	VII
SC	23	31	6	0	0	0	5	2	0
ST	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
OBC	11	60	17	0	0	0	1	1	7
OC	2	9	20	13	6	2	4	5	4
Total	36	100	43	13	6	2	10	9	11

**Classes of labour:** Table 5.2 presents the class categories of village households. The first three classes are termed as workers or the labouring class. These classes can be described as what Bernstein terms as ‘classes of labour’. All these households engage in wage work inside and/or outside agriculture. Except a few in the Class I of these three worker classes, all the households own a certain amount of land. The defining feature of these classes is that they largely depend on the sale of

their labour. They do hire-in labour on their small farms and engage in self-cultivation, which are nevertheless outweighed by their total engagement in hiring-out for wages –they are net sellers of labour.

However, there is gradation within these classes of labour in terms of sale of labour relative to self-employment (self-cultivation) and the magnitude of land they own. The households in Class I of the worker classes are either landless or hold insignificant land, mostly less than an acre of dry land. Their land may be cultivated or left uncultivated contingent on mobilization of resources and availability of their members within the village to oversee preparation of land, sowing and monitoring the crop till harvest. Some of them own only a small patch of land under tank, all of which has been left fallow since more than a decade now. The Class II among these classes of labour is very similar to the Class I but hold slightly more land, mostly in the range of one to three acres of land. As the magnitude of land is considerably significant and some of them had invested money in buying land, they make efforts to mobilise resources to cultivate. Yet, some fail to do so. Only a few of them have access to borewell irrigation created in partnership with multiple households and only to a part of their plots.

There is certain fluidity between the first two of the labour classes, which allows both upward or downward mobility between the members of the two classes. The movement downward is affected by factors like fragmentation of land when the families divide and ‘idiosyncratic’ shocks like long-term illness or an accidental injury to a household member or untimely death of a working member, which restrains them from working away from village. Upward mobility is experienced through migrant remittances in case of members working for a long periods away from village, which manifests sometimes in buying a piece of land or sinking a borewell on own or in partnership.

A majority of the households in the village and among SCs and OBCs belong to the labour class corresponding to these first two classes of labour–59percent of the village households, 82 percent among the SC and 73 percent among the OBC households. The third of these classes of households own land mostly between three to five acres (a few own more than five acres). About 18% of the total households, 9

percent among SC, 17% among OBC and 30 percent among OC households belong to this category. This class is largely a result of economic upward mobility among the SCs and OBCs with buying of land and creating ground water irrigation through mostly migrant remittances, and through rearing of sheep among the traditional shepherd caste of golla (OBC) along with migrant remittances. Half of this class among OBCs is composed of gollas, whose status is closer to 'self-employed' with at least one of their household member engaged in sheep rearing throughout the year and others engaged in cultivation and wage labour. Whereas, this class position largely indicates a downward mobility among the OCs, either as a result of sale or fragmentation of land. This movement among the OCs is socially downward but not necessarily economic i.e., from a self-employed status in agriculture to sellers of labour, mostly away from the village. Cultivation and efforts to improve cultivation (for example, through their attempts at creating irrigation) assumes prominence in their household economic activity. This, however, is linked to their engagement in wage labour, particularly in the non-farm. The investment in agriculture in this as well as the former classes is mostly dependant on the non-farm wage incomes. Without an exception, all the attempts at creating borewell irrigation in this class were borne by non-farm incomes. Compared to the former two classes, this class invests more money and labour in cultivation and also suffers from higher risks in cultivation.

About three-fourths (78 percent) of the village households belong to the worker or labour class termed as 'classes of labour'. About 90 percent both among the SCs and OBCs and nearly half of the OC households belong to this class. The households in this class possess land of varying sizes but the common feature among these households is that their members engage in manual wage labour, either within or away from the village. The nature of manual work is mostly common among these classes, with some variation and hierarchy within manual work based on skill but does not reflect clear class specificities within these classes of labour. However, closer observation of these households reveals that the households that had members working away from the village for several years enabled their children to learn skilled work in the non-farm sector. Some of the young male members, mostly within the construction industry specialized in constructing/laying brick walls, cement plastering, laying tiles, plumber works, painting etc. earn a higher wage compared to

the least skilled in the work hierarchy. Households that stuck on to cultivation and only seasonally worked or started working away from the village in the recent years are at a disadvantage in this regard. Their members mostly have access to only the ‘begari’ work, the lowest in the work hierarchy in construction that rewards low wages. The former, of course, is a recent trend (discussed in the next chapter on non-farm employment). But this is bound to have an effect on class configurations within these classes of labour in the near future.

**Farmer Class:** This is another predominant class among the OCs especially the Reddys. Nearly thirty percent of the households among the Reddys belong to this class of farmer/cultivator households. This is the predominant labour employing class within the village. No household from the SCs or OBCs belong to this class. The household members in this class too engage in manual work in the fields along with the hired labourers and also engage in some or the other agriculture-related work almost throughout the year.

This class is further divided into two subclasses (IVa and IVb in Table 5.2). Two-thirds of households of this class belong to the first subclass (IVa), whose members (women) engage in mutual exchange of agricultural labour (work in each others’ fields), and some also engage in agricultural wage labour (mostly female members). Majority of these households have at least one member or a married couple working away from the village, mostly in the informal sector, if not all of them in manual wage work like in construction industry. Only four out of 13 households in this subcategory of farmer households have members never migrated out of the village for work, but engage, although, less frequently in agricultural wage work. A couple of women also engage in tailoring work, and one male member drives an auto-rickshaw – residing within the village. The remaining nine households have members who have migrated away from the village for wage work either during the survey or in the recent past. Presently, the nature of work these persons engage in ranges from wage work in construction to working as sales boys – one works in pharmacy company on a temporary basis with little education, one is a car driver with a private owner, a few are sales boys in jewellery shops, grocery shops and flower shops, one does private electric works, and the remaining work as wage labour in construction

like those of 'classes of labour'. This subclass of farmer households own mostly between five to ten acres of land, including some irrigated land. The remaining one-third of the farmer class households belong to the other subclass (IVb) whose members solely engage in self-cultivation. No person among these households engages in wage work either within or away from the village. The land holdings in this subclass range between 10 to 29 acres - three households own less than 15 acres and the remaining three own 21, 26 and 29 acres each. A few of these households are known to lend out money for interest. One of them bought a tractor recently, which is rented out for tilling land; two others were contemplating to buy tractors.

**Supervisory and rentier class:** Two households among the Reddys belong to this class. They do not engage in manual work as such even when they cultivate land. Of late, they have started leasing out land on shared-crop basis. They are rentier class because they lease out land. But this leasing out is different from classes of labour that in some cases lease out land in the village but engage in wage work. The two households of this rentier class are, however, not the 'large' landowning households. One of them lends out money for interest within the village and other neighbouring villages. The other used to rent its tractor out for tilling land and for other purposes, which is sold off recently. Both of them are politically active and contract public works.

**Salaried class:** The households that have at least one member earning a regular salary either as a government employee (either permanent or on contract/temporary basis) or an employee in formal sector including those that receive pensions after retirement as a government employee are categorised as salaried class. This is in contrast with the households whose members engage either in casual wage work or regular wage (monthly wage) in informal sector like in the case of sales boys or a car driver.

The salaried class is further divided into two subclasses (Va and Vb) that exhibit significant differences in economic status: one (Va) that includes households with at least one member with a permanent job, paid according to government or formal sector norms or receiving pension according to the norms applicable to government employee; another (Vb) includes households that have at least one

member employed to serve the government on low-paid contracts like *Anganwadi* (ICDS) workers etc.

The first subclass of salaried class has 10 households— five from SCs, one from OBCs and four from OCs: the five households among SCs have one member each holding a permanent government job— one school teacher (female member) and one police constable with the AP state government and the other three households hold low level jobs, one ‘attender’ in a telephone exchange office in Mumbai and two garbage lifters under Mumbai city municipal corporation<sup>124</sup>; one household that belongs to *jangam* caste (officially OBC, but shares social and economic features of a forward caste, as discussed earlier) has a member employed as a skilled worker (mechanical designer) in a private automobile company; of the four households among the OCs (all four Reddys) two households have a member each working in private sector—one in a private (ICICI) bank and another working since recently as CA (Chartered Accountant) in a private firm- and the other two have one member each who receive pension, one retired teacher and another ex-service man (who was relieved due to some injury during the training period itself). The other subclass (Vb) of the salaried class has eight households, two among the SCs, one each among the STs and OBCs and five among OCs which receive remunerations/honorariums from the government based on contracts or official positions: one SC household in this category has a member employed as ‘Field Assistant’ in NREGA and another SC household has one female working as ‘mid-day’ meal cook and her husband as ‘prerak’(under continuous education programme); the ST household has a member elected as village *sarpanch* (receives monthly honorarium); one OBC household has a member employed as ‘village secretary’ (administrative officer) on a temporary basis; the five households among the OCs have one member each working on similar lines- two *Anganwadi* (ICDS) workers, one mid-day meals cook, one volunteer (education volunteer) and one ‘dealer’ to distribute goods under PDS.

The Reddys, at least some of the households in the past, had large landholdings. But this did not translate much into acquiring higher education and

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<sup>124</sup> It is known that the manual scavengers employed in public municipal corporations across the states largely belonged to the Scheduled Castes. The SCs of the AP are known to work as garbage cleaners in municipal corporations in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and mostly within the state of AP.

employment in the government and other formal sector. This reflects the limited possibility of socio-economic mobility based on dryland agriculture even with large holdings of land. Only two persons from two families got employed in government jobs in the past. One was an electrical engineer who along with his family permanently shifted to the city of Hyderabad (not included in the classes of village), who has left his house and land to his sister's family which takes care of his mother. The other was a school teacher (retired), who lives along with his married sons in a joint family within the village. One of his sons teaches in a private school in the nearby village for a monthly salary of Rs. 3,000 and others along with their wives engage in agriculture work. Only two persons are employed formally in the private sector as mentioned above. However, a few more were pursuing higher education at the level of Bachelors and Masters Degree.

**Self-employed class:** There are 11 households engaged in non-farm self employment, of which, seven of them also undertake cultivation on their own land. Seven of them are from OBC— two are carpenters (following 'hereditary profession'), one does carpentry along with sale of toddy (from a traditional toddy tapping caste), one is a blacksmith along with carpentry work (also from traditional toddy tapping caste), one runs a grinding machine along with tailoring work (traditional toddy tappers), one is a flower vendor near a temple in Mumbai and one (from Muslim 'pinjari' caste) drives his own second-hand jeep to ferry people between the village and the nearest market village. Of the four self-employed households among the OCs, two are komatis (*vaishyas*), who each run a small grocery shop combined with vending tea, and one *reddy* household member does motor winding works (repairs borewell motors) and another has two members, father and son, who work as insurance agents for the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), India.

## **5.2. Livelihood and everyday life of 'classes of labour': Case studies**

In this chapter the qualitative aspects of labouring households' economic life will be explored. It is done by emphasising the detail and through the description and analysis of the way the household economy is organised as well as the everyday politics of assertion and drive for social mobility. It is within this context that individuals and households negotiate their livelihoods inside and outside the village.

Case studies will be used to describe and reflect on the commonality between and segmentation within the various socioeconomic categories which are delineated in the next chapter. This ethnographic detail presented as case studies within the caste-class context also form the basis for analysis of trends and the trajectories of change in the conditions of life and social relations, especially, those that involve economic interactions discussed in the concluding section of the next chapter on the forms of labour and changing labour relations within agriculture. Other details from the field would be presented wherever it is relevant and necessary in the next chapter. In sum, this chapter attempts to depict social differentiation and economic life in the village and its links beyond the village with specific cases of ‘classes of labour’ that constitute a majority of Chennaram’s households.

### **5.2.1 Case study-1: A *golla* (OBC) household**

Hanmanthu (27 years) and his wife Padmamma (23 years) belong to the *golla* caste (OBC). Besides this couple the household consists of their three children – two sons (7 and 5 years old) and one daughter (3 years), Hanmanthu’s brother (19 years old) and his old aunt (she is Hanmanthu’s late father’s sister. Her husband left her at a very young age as both her children died immediately after birth). This household owns five acres of dry land and half an acre of wet land (under the *ayacut* of the tank).

Hanmanthu and Padmamma returned to the village from the city of Nasik in March 2007 to go on a pilgrimage to Srisailam (close to the border of Mahbubnagar). They named their second son, Mallesh after ‘lord Mallikarjuna’ of Srisailam. About two years ago (2005), Mallesh was ill (with diarrheal symptoms) and was admitted to a hospital in a nearby town. Panicked by the news after they were informed by Hanmanthu’s aunt (who was taking care of his children in the village) Hanmanthu, his wife and brother returned from Nasik. They vowed a pilgrimage to *mallanna* if the kid was recovered. It has been more than two years since he was cured, but they could not visit Srisailam. Hanmanthu says, “it is not good to delay any *mokku* (vow) for a long time”; so they have planned to fulfill it this time.

Hanmanthu, his brother and Padmamma had no formal education. When Hanmanthu was a child his father bought him a slate and sent him to the school in the village. The slate slipped from his hand and broke on the very first day on the way to

school. “So my father said this (expenditure and trial-run) is enough for you, and sent me to graze our sheep”, Hanmanthu puts it humorously. Hanmanthu reared sheep in his childhood, something his father also did for most of his life. Hanmanthu’s father inherited only a quarter acre of land under the *tankayacut*, his share of his father’s land that was split with his two brothers.

*Gollas* are traditional shepherds. By rearing sheep, Hanmanthu’s father bought altogether five acres of dry land – three acres from *telugollu*(OBC)of the same village and later, 2 acres from *reddys* of a neighbouringvillage<sup>125</sup>and one-fourth of an acre of wet land from *reddys* within the village.He sold all the sheep and dug an openwell to shift their occupation mainly to agriculture. He took a loan of Rs.5,000 from the bank, and another Rs.5,000 from one *sakali* (OBC) person, apart from selling all sheep to meet the expenses of digging the well and buying a diesel engine for irrigation. Once they produced 40 bags of groundnut through the irrigation from these sources. Very soon after this venture Hanmanthu’s father fell ill. His illness, Hanmanthu says, was a result of *shatavadi* (witchcraft) by his kin members as “they were jealous of his new prosperity.”

The next year their openwell caved in, as the soil was loose, and got filled with mud. Hanmanthu’s father sold the motor and pump, and repaid the debt of the *sakali* person. His health deteriorated further (due to tuberculosis) and he became weaker day by day. The economic situation at home became worse. Hanmanthu says, “we did not have enough food grains to eat”. Only Hanmanthu’s mother and his father’s sister used to earn an agricultural wage. His younger sister and brother were too young to work. In this situation, he was employed for *gaasamu* (‘attached’ agricultural labour) at V. Reddy for a loan of Rs.5000 including a yearly wage of Rs. 1000. Hanmanthu’s father used this money to repay *reddys* of the neighbouring village in lieu of the two acres of land he had bought earlier.

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<sup>125</sup>There has been a net transfer of lands through sales from upper to lower caste groups. Also, in a recent study conducted in two districts of Telangana including Mahbubnagar, and one district of Rayalaseema regions of A.P state, Galeb and Revathi (2006) point out that purchase of lands by middle castes (OBCs) as one among other factors that led to the change in the structure of land.

Hanmanthu was made to do all kinds of work “from cleaning dishes, clearing dung from the cattle shed, grazing cattle to ploughing land”. He says “it was very tough at V. Reddy that every *gaasagadu* used to run away before finishing the term”. “I was very young. I could at the most plough land. I was not strong enough to do the kind of work available in *Bombai* (the city of Mumbai). But I knew that only by going to *Bombai*, I will be able to get free from this debt”. After working for two years with V. Reddy only Rs.2,000 out of the loan of Rs.5,000 was repaid. Hanmanthu stopped going to V.Reddy’s house to work at the end of two years. V.Reddy insisted that he quit *gaasamu* only after repaying the remaining debt of Rs.3000. His parents negotiated with V.Reddy and got two months of time to clear the debt.

Hanmanthu and his mother went to Mumbai, worked for two months and sent Rs.2000 home. He says, “as I was very young, I was paid only a ‘woman’s wage’ of Rs.35 per day”. V.Reddy’s debt was cleared by borrowing another thousand rupees in the village. Hanmanthu and his mother were asked to return to the village as his father was feared to be on his deathbed. His father, however, lived longer. He says, “we came back from *Bombai* and days passed by, but he did not die; nor could we leave him in that state and go back to *Bombai*”. Therefore he started doing wage labour in the village itself. He used to get foodgrain from C. Reddy (*malipatel*Chenna Reddy), where he worked, and survived. After six months, his father died. His mother started becoming physically weak day by day after his father passed away. “One day when she was working in V.Reddy’s field during transplantation of paddy, she vomited blood. The doctor in Kotakonda (village) said she has cancer and will not survive.” “When she died, we did not have a single rupee to bury her”.

Hanmanthu borrowed Rs. 800 from C.Reddy to meet the expenses of the burial. His brother did *gaasamu* to rear cattle at C.Reddy for two years against the debt of Rs. 800 (for a yearly wage of Rs.400). Hanmanthu continued to cultivate his land besides hiring out for wage labour in the village itself. The half acre of land under the tank was relatively more productive compared to the 5 acres of dry land. His younger sister and his paternal aunt also used to engage both in own-cultivation and agricultural wage. His maternal aunt who lives in a nearby village borrowed

Rs.15,000 and helped both Hanmanthu and his sister get married. He was around 18yearsold when he got married.

One day people from the bank from which Hanmanthu's father took a loan had come and threatened to lock their house and sell his father's land to recover Rs.10,000, the loan for openwell including interest for about five years. Hanmanthu sought some time to clear the loan. His father's friend's son, Pilli Chennaiah (SC, from the household discussed earlier), who had returned from Nasik, advised Hanmanthu to go along with him to Nasik and work.

Hanmanthu first sent his brother to Mumbai, who had finished his two-year term with C. Reddy, along with Moulana (a muslim from the same village), who worked there under a contractor to supply grass (fodder for milch buffaloes). Moulana put Hanmanthu's brother to work in a gym owned by his contractor. Then Hanmanthu accompanied Chennaiah to Nasik. He went alone as his wife was too young (around 14 years old when she got married) to work in construction. In the mean time his sister's husband borrowed money to clear the bank loan. Hanmanthu worked for two years in Nasik. He used to return to the village for sowing in the rainy season, while his aunt and his wife took care of the crops till harvest.

After two years, Hanmanthu moved to work in Mumbai so that he could see his brother as he was alone there. He stayed along with his maternal uncle at a construction site there. The next year, S. Reddy, another migrant labourer from the village, took both Hanmanthu and his wife to Ulhasnagar(near Mumbai). S. Reddy helped them get a *jhopad* (flimsy slum dwelling) for rent in the slum where he and some others from the same village lived. This time Hanmanthu and his wife worked for six months and returned to the village and cleared all their debt (debt taken for marriage and the bank loan).

Hanmanthu dug a borewell (in 2003) in partnership with B. Balappa (*telugu* caste, OBC) whose land was adjacent to his land. He says, "we also wanted to cultivate like the *reddys*". They together spent Rs.11,000 for drilling, Rs.26,000 for the electric line to the field and Rs.16,000 for the motor and pumpset. Hanmanthuhadalso bought two bullocks. He had taken a loan of Rs.13,000 from

K.Reddy (from same village), his mother's sister helped him get another loan of Rs.14,000 from a *reddy* (from Mahabubnagar town) and his sister's husband got him a debt of Rs. 10,000 from Narayanpet (nearby town). After cultivation of two crops their borewell "failed" He says, "the crop harvested was very meager because of poor soil fertility. Whatever we produced did not suffice to repay even the interest on the debt, while the interest kept shooting up".

One day, Hanmanthu discussed about the debt with his brother, and decided to leave with his wife to Nasik and that his brother would join them after selling the bullocks. While they started repaying this debt, Hanmanthu's second son (mentioned earlier) fell ill. "We got Rs.10,000 from Nasik and not a single rupee was left with us" after medical and other expenses. After he got cured, Hanmanthu says, "My brother, my wife and I worked continuously in Nasik all through the year and saved a lot of money. While my wife's earnings were spent towards food, I and my brother saved Rs.1,500 a week". They repaid most of the debt including interest. However, K.Reddy showed a balance of Rs.2,000 after repaying what Hanmanthu thought was the full debt. K.Reddy not only charged an interest rate of Rs. 3 per Rs.100 per month (annual interest of 36%) like others, but also adds the amount of interest to the principal every six months and calculated interest for the total thereafter. Thus, for about three years, Hanmanthu had to pay a huge amount.

A year ago (a year before I first interviewed him), Hanmanthu's brother fell from the third floor of a building under-construction while he was working, and both his ankles broke. The employer paid him Rs.5,000 as compensation. Hanmanthu, his wife and his friend (from a neighbouring village) brought his brother from Nasik to Mahbubnagar town. He did not like the doctor's diagnosis that advised that his brother's ankles be immobilized in a cast for a long time. On the advice of people in the village he took his brother to a traditional bone setter in a far-off village in the same district. This time, he borrowed Rs. 5,000 from J.C. Reddy in the village. He spent more than a month for his brother, taking him to the bone setter every week. After his brother recovered slightly, he and his wife went back to Nasik again. They both worked for about a year and came back to the village to repay the debt and go on the pilgrimage. He repaid J.C. Reddy's money within six months with money earned in Nasik, before the interest was added to the principal.

Still, the debt of Rs.14,000 his maternal aunt borrowed from a *reddy* in Mahbubnagar was pending and it amounted to Rs.25,000, along with the remaining debt of K.Reddy in the village. Later he and his wife saved around Rs.10,000 and withdrew Rs.10,000 from the “chitti” (chit fund) in which he was depositing Rs. 500 fortnightly along with a group of 20 men in Nasik (a group of men, and women as well, but separately) come together and save a certain amount of money on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. One of them who is in need or in turns take the whole money. This way, they feel, it not only helps one in times of need, but also that this does not carry the burden of interest. This ‘chitti’ has different forms, which is discussed later. Although Hanmanthu often verbally abuses K.Reddy behind his back because he adds the interest to the principal, but Hanmanthu took afresh loan of Rs.10,000 (after clearing the pending Rs.3,000)to clear the long-pending debt of Rs.25,000 in Mahbubnagar. Whereas, Hanmanthu was in praise of the *reddy* in Mahbubnagar as the latter not only did not add the interest to the principal every six months, but offered Rs.1,000 to Hanmanthu and asked him to buy clothes for his family members. He and his wife bought cloths for all their whole family and visited Srisailam. All male members tonsured their heads at the temple.

After almost a month away from work for this pilgrimage and the festival of *ugadi* (March, 2007), Hanmanthu left for Nasik. He left for the city alone in order to hire a *jhopad* to stay, after which his wife could join him. They had vacated their earlier *jhopad* (shack) before returning to the village. He says it was too small and the roof was so low that he could not stand straight to wear his pants. Further, they could save a month’s rent as they were away. Within two days he found one for a monthly rent of Rs.500 and paid an advance (deposit) of Rs. 2,000. He borrowed money for this from B. Chennappa(SC), his friend since childhood, who hails from the same village. The latest shack is about 6X7 feet in area with walls and roof made of metal/tin sheets. There is no separate cooking and washing space in this shack. Padmamma washes clothes and dishes on the floor within the shack near the entrance so that the water drains out through the entrance.

The next week Padmamma began her journey to Nasik with luggage packed with rice and jowar (since they are costlier in the city), along with other women and men from this village and neighbouring villages (along with whom I travelled to

Nasik). Every Tuesday two private vehicles (jeeps) ferry people from the villages (about seven villages in the vicinity) to the *jhopadpatti* in Nasik and return on Thursday. In each vehicle, meant for nine people, there were 25 persons travelling including children. The drivers say they carry around 30 people in the peak seasons of out migration and return migration. The journey is around 17-hours long. It is not legal to transport people in private vehicles other than taxis. More importantly, in view of the *Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1978*, which applies to every establishment or contractor employing five or more inter-state workers, and the *Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976* that are meant to regulate the conditions of work and workers such movement of workers is inspected at the borders.

To avoid any possible complication, the drivers of the vehicles bribe the police at every check post on the way to Nasik. The fare is Rs. 450 for an adult and half of it for a child. It is around three times more than the fare by train in a general (unreserved) compartment. The workers prefer this mode of travel not only because these vehicles pick them up directly from their villages but they can pay the fare a few days later after earning wage at the destination, and when they return from Nasik it is considered a safe mode as they carry money that they saved.

We arrive at the destination, the *jhopadpatti* (slum) in Nasik, around three in the night. Many men from this slum were sleeping on the footpath of the main road close to the slum; some slept there to receive their women and children and their luggage. In the many shacks, more than one couple lives in the small space, which usually ranges between 5x6 and 7x8 feet. A couple with children, if any, sleeps in a shack, while any additional men sleep outside. If there is more than a single couple then only women and children sleep within the shack while men sleep outdoors. If it rains they take shelter near the closed shutters of the shops beside the road. This slum on the outskirts of the city is located between the main road and a huge open drain, with a few shacks extending on to the other bank of the drain too. It is not visible from the road with high-rise buildings bordering the road.

This *jhopadpatti* has populations mostly drawn from the villages in the vicinity of Chennaram. They mostly belong to SC and OBC castes. Besides these migrants, there are people from semi-arid districts of Maharashtra like Nanded and

Aurangabad as well. Unlike in the villages where the respective communities are marked and separated, roughly if not clearly in their physical settlement patterns, no such segregation is observable in this slum. However, if one looks at settlement patterns of various castes from a particular village in urban slums, there is a propensity of particular caste/sto prefer to live in particular slum/s (discussed later in patterns of migration). The households/members from Chennaram village settled in this slum are mostly SCs with a few exceptions of OBCs and OCs. But not all SCs of the village have settled here. They have also moved to particular slums in Mumbai.

The size of this slum has been decreased as some slum dwellers were evicted by the government and 'real estate developers' who were persuading, or forcibly evicting shack owners offering compensation. A narrow lane leading to the slum from the road was also about to go into private hands. In response to this imminent threat to the lane and the slum, a temple in the honour of a local goddess was erected overnight on the lane by the slum dwellers. This created tense moments with the other residents and owners of the buildings complaining and attempting to bring this temple structure down. The structure was retained once a local political leader from the Shiva Sena intervened. One person, Narsanna(OBC), from one of the neighbouring villages of Chennaram, who had been a labour contractor and was living in this slum for more than 30 years had played an active role in enrolling some of the slum dwellers as voters and getting their ownership of shacks registered through the help of the Shiva Sena, and these initiatives helped ensure their loyalty to the party. He owned more than one shack earlier, and built a relatively better house in this slum. In recent years, however, the youth from the SCs, most of whom are brought up here, have associated themselves with a local dalit organisation named after Ambedkar. They usually support the Congress party during the elections.

The morning after arriving I joined Hanmanthu, he like some other men there prefers to walk two to three kilometers to attend to the call of nature and bathe on the banks of river Godavari, after my failed attempt to use public toilets in the slum, which are overcrowded with men waiting in queues<sup>126</sup>. Women wake up very early in

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<sup>126</sup> There are public toilets (separate) for women and men, with private managements that collect money on a daily or monthly basis from users. Users carry their monthly prepaid-cards along with water to these toilets. Some men avoid these toilets and prefer to walk to the banks of the Godavari river instead. Spaces for open/outdoor defecation are preferred over public toilets due to the over

the morning to avoid waiting in queues at the public toilets. Unlike men they have to cook and wash clothes before they set out to work.

Both Hanmanthu and Padmamma are out at the *naaka*, the labour (transaction) point, by eight in the morning with their lunch boxes. They reach their respective work sites mostly by the next hour. Padmamma travels to the work sites and back, along with other women, either by hiring an autorickshaw or in the vehicles that are sometimes arranged by the employers. Employers in Nasik pay daily transit charges of Rs.10 if the work destination is near the *jopadpatti* and Rs.20 if it is farther away. Like some other men, Hanmanthu owns a bicycle to travel to the worksite so that he can save Rs.20 a day paid for travel by the employers.

The couple learnt to speak Marathi and Hindi with the employers and other non-Telugu workers. Hanmanthu says, initially he had to depend on other Telugus to negotiate wages with the employers/labour contractors. He also learnt a few English numbers. He can read the time in his digital watch. He can calculate, although not on paper, the total wage for a weekday and for a month. His wife can calculate more accurately and quickly the wage they together would earn in total for weekdays and for four weeks (a month) excluding the days they take off from work.

Hanmanthu was working with Gorak (a Marathi), native *tekedhar*, along with two Telugu *mestris* hailing from villages near Chennaram and a few other Marathi migrant men and women. He has specialised for the last two years in fixing *parancha* (temporary wooden scaffolding to enable men to stand on while laying brick walls or plastering cement). It was his second week with Gorak when I visited his worksite. He was not interested to continue to work with Gorak. This is because, he says, “Gorak doesn’t know how to deliver and oversee work. He asks me to use a hammer which has become very blunt. My shoulder is paining. He tells me that Narsanna (SC from Chennaram) doesn’t complain and works with the same hammer. I told him then that you should have got your work done by Narsanna, I have plenty of work available elsewhere in Nasik”. Not satisfied with reasons for quitting work with Gorak, I kept probing. He then adds “I also heard that he doesn’t pay the wage every week regularly. Last week he did not pay me full wage. He withheld one day’s wage

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crowded and unhygienic conditions, but open spaces are not always available to slum dwellers (discussed later in the section dealing with the condition of life in the slums).

so that I'll continue to work the next week because of the pending wage". More importantly, he adds, "I do not like to work when there are Telugu *mestris*. They call me in between my work to hand over something or remove something...if non-Telugus ask me to do anything in between my work, I tell them that 'I am busy' or 'do it yourself'. If we say the same thing to 'our' people (people from villages of the same region), we end up having misunderstandings and quarrels".

Hanmanthu does work and likes to work along with other Telugus from his village and other village, but when they are in the same or lower work hierarchy and not with those Telugus who are above in the hierarchy like *mestris* or *tekedhars*. Significant to note here is that the two *mestris* working at this site belong to the Scheduled Caste that is considered lower in social hierarchy compared to Hanmanthu's caste. Although he mentions their caste and the villages they hail from, he does not cite their caste as a reason for his dislike to work at this site. Caste does come into play. But workers in the lower hierarchy prefer to avoid *mestris* and *tekedhars* from the same region irrespective of whether their caste is lower or same or higher in hierarchy, and more so when they are from lower or same hierarchy. This, I found seemed to be one of the more important reasons for Hanmanthu to quit working for Gorak.

At the work sites, a mix of migrant labour from different regions are employed. While this is a strategy of the employers not to depend only on workers from one particular region, and to ensure the workers are not strongly united, it is also a strategy of the workers to avoid any conflict with people from their own region if they are positioned higher in the work hierarchy. Telugu *tekedars* invoke the regional bond with Telugu labourers to employ them, but the labourers consciously avoid any such obligations.

One *tekedhar* says, "'our' people do not have any sense of (regional/linguistic) bonding; they go and work with non-Telugus". Some young and slightly better-off men who have taken to contracting part of a building construction try to persuade workers from their own region to work with them but do not succeed for long. Telugu *tekedhars* approach migrant labour from other regions/states. The first generation Telugu *tekedhars* (who migrated and played a crucial role in migration of labourers) made money employing labour from their own region at destinations like Nasik. They

benefited from this activity but started venturing into new fields because “today the labourers are not the same”. Two such *tekedhars* (both OBC) bought two jeeps and employed drivers to ferry labourers from villages to Nasik and back. Narsanna (an OBC of around 50 years of age) claims to be a ‘labour contractor’ (for the last 25 years) to differentiate himself from the smaller and younger *tekedhars*. He says, “I bought lands, constructed a house, started a wood-cutting machine in the village, educated my children only on this *dhanda* (business), but now it is not more productive and this is why I am planning to go back to the village and not let any of my sons continue this work”.

The Telugu employers use their common identity of neighbourhood, caste and kinship (mostly fictitious) to hire migrant workers. But the workers’ conscious strategy is to avoid them as they cannot bargain higher wages, cannot escape hard work by resorting to ‘foot-dragging’ as this would mean a faceoff between the members of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, and most importantly, it is their self-respect that is at stake if people from their own caste and/or neighbourhood pushed them around. This is because, self-esteem and protection of dignity assumes more prominence in the interactions with members, kin groups and castes that are closely related or located closely, both socially and spatially, with one another.

At the end of second the week (each week ends on Wednesday, which is the payment day) Hanmanthu decided not to continue with Gorak for the next week. On Wednesday, he and others working with Gorak took leave from work. Hanmanthu called up Gorak for his wage. Usually Wednesday’s wage, if they work, is withheld by the employers and the wage till the previous day is paid. Most of the employers practice withholding of a day’s wage to ensure that the labourers return for work the next day for the pending wage. Now that Hanmanthu did not work on Wednesday, he thought that there is less chance of a day’s wage being withheld and he can change his employer the very next day. But sensing that Hanmanthu may avoid working with him, Gorak once again withheld a day’s wage despite Hanmanthu’s insistence on payment for the full week. Hanmanthu, however, decided to change the *tekedhar*. He was confident that his one day wage will not be lost. “I will ask Gorak to send my wage through the *mestris* (from the same settlement). If he doesn’t I will catch hold of

him when he comes to the *naaka* and extract my wage or else I will pressure him by saying that I will inform other labourers that you do not pay wages properly”.

Hanmanthu has already inquired about the availability of work. Venkataiah and Hanmanthu’s friend Chennappa (both from Chennaram) were working together with a Rajasthani employer. Venkataiah was leaving for the village and asked Hanmanthu to replace him. Hanmanthu agreed and went to work along with his friend Chennappa. He also had an option of going to another ‘tekedhar’, Shambu, with whom he worked before going to the village. Shambu gave his mobile number and asked Hanmanthu to call him once he returns back to Nasik to join for work. Although Hanmanthu likes to work with Shambu, he does not call Shambu. “If I call him to join work, he might pay me only a wage of Rs. 180 and not Rs. 200 per day. Wages have increased from Rs.180 to 200 by the time I came back from village. Only if he comes to the ‘naaka’ to hire labour, I can demand Rs. 200 per day”. On the same Wednesday, Hanmanthu’s wife Padmamma also changed her employer. The previous employer had come in a van to ferry women labourers. Seeing him, Padmamma tries to avoid him at the ‘naaka’, but the ‘tekhedar’ appears right in front of her. Padmamma tricks him saying that she would call and bring other women and slips away from the site. Observing this, I asked her why she doesn’t like to go to work with this ‘tekhedar’. She replies “he talks nicely here at the ‘naaka’, but is always behind us insisting us to work and shouts if we take a break from work even for a short while; so all of us have decided not to work with him”. After some time the ‘tekedhar’ goes around in search of these women and traces Padmamma once again. This time she tells him that other women are going elsewhere to work and along with them she too has given her word to the other ‘tekedhar’, and she will go back to work with him the next week. The ‘tekedhar’ then left the ‘naaka’ empty van with no women agreeing to go to work with him that day.

Hanmanthu and his family decided to cultivate their land themselves in the coming monsoon. After the failure of the borewell, they left their land fallow for a year. After they started working, once again away from the village, now in Nasik, and started repaying the debt, they gave their land for sharecropping for two years. He says, however, that “we did not get any benefit out of sharecropping”. Last year the land was uncultivated as his brother had not yet recovered from leg injury.

Hanmanthu was not in a position to invest in cultivation, nor could he afford to stay in the village for cultivation. This year, as they cleared the pending debts they decided to cultivate some part of their land. Hanmanthu and his wife would send money from Nasik to invest in cultivation while his brother could take care of ploughing and sowing. Hanmanthu says they cannot afford to invest to cultivate all five acres of their land. When he was in the village during the month of March, he made an arrangement with C.Reddy, who has two pairs of bullocks. C.Reddy owns 21 acres of land. He needs men to plough his land but no labourer is working on the basis of yearly-wage contract. It is difficult to hire daily wage labourers as everyone will be busy in their own cultivation work. It is his (C.Reddy's) strategy to first lend his bullocks to some men needing to plough and cultivate their lands and in turn get these men to plough and sow his own land. Hanmanthu convinced his brother to enter this arrangement, but told him to work only for a week with C.Reddy in return for his two pairs of bullocks and one man for a couple of days. But, C.Reddy made Hanmanthu's brother work for more than two weeks. He talks to his brother on phone and asks him to pressure C.Reddy to pay wage or else say "I will quit and hire tractor for ploughing our land". This indeed happened. Next year they cultivated land using machinery, so that Hanmanthu's brother could join wage work in Naisk while their aunt took care of cultivation

It was the same C.Reddy with whom his brother did 'jeetham' (attached labour) for two years for an amount of Rs. 800. But today Hanmanthu and his brother bargain with C. Reddy. Non-farm income and the availability of tractor have enabled them to strike a better bargain with C. Reddy. On the other hand, C.Reddy, like his counter parts, would not depend on labourers, but hires tractor for ploughing. It is only for sowing seed and leveling in dryland still bullocks and bullock drawn implements are used.

Working both in the village and away from the village and away from the children, Hanmanthu's family survived. Hanmanthu says, for what their struggle meant, "We did not throw away our children, but kept them alive and raised them". They also have long-term strategies. "I want to educate at least one of our children. We cannot afford to educate all. My eldest son is sharp in studies. The second one is dull. So I want to educate the eldest one as he is also physically weak and may not be

able to do hard work like us. Educating only till class ten is of no use these days. So, I would make him continue his education as long as he can, at least like Husenappa's son (doing undergraduate in course in Biological Sciences). We will send my second son and my daughter till class five or six in the village itself". Hanmanthu has been paying 'LIC' (insurance) of Rs. 1,400 per year since last three years. "B.Reddy (insurance agent) told me that even if I withdraw this amount after paying for six years, I will get double the amount I paid. This amount is meant for my daughter. We don't know what will be the situation after some years. So, this will be helpful for her marriage. In case if I die, my family gets money. Recently when the sakali fellow died his family got money". This year Hanmanthu also started paying an insurance amount of Rs. 1,200 per annum on his brother's name. He is also part of a 'chitti' group in Nasik.

Hanmanthu has planned for the next five years. He wants to first marry off his brother in the next two years. Then both the couples could work hard in Nasik and construct a house in the village in the next five years. He also plans to take a loan to rear sheep. This, he says, is because the interest rate is low in a bank. He also has a plan to dig a bore well after some years and do agriculture and stay in the village itself.

### **5.2.2 Case Study-2: SC household**

Pilli Chennappa (43-years old), his wife Kajamma(36-years old) and their four children form a household that belongs to *Madiga* caste(SC) and represents class II of the 'classes of labour'. They own one acre of dry land and half of an acre of land under the tank ayacut. They built a house in the village around the year 2000 with government support through a house loan, which has two rooms, a concrete roof, a stone wall and a stone floor. Even before this house they bought a small shack, one room with brick walls, roof of tin sheets and cemented floor, in a slum near a huge drainage line in the city of Nasik. They do not have drinking water connections at both places, and had no electric connections either. Only recently they got electricity in the village unofficially (without a reading metre) after the announcement in 2004 by the government of 'free power' for a single electric bulb.

Chennappa works only in Nasik (an industrial city in the state of Maharashtra) and visits the village once or twice in a year. Kajamma usually stays in the village during the rainy season to take care of sowing and weeding of crops in their one acre of dry land. Then she spends about eight to nine months working in Nasik, along with Chennappa. During her stay in the village she takes care of her children and when she moves to Nasik, she leaves them with her mother who lives in the same village. Three of her children go to school and the eldest son failed intermediate. In the agricultural year 2006-07, she took charge of cultivation of a mixed crop of red gram and green gram in their land. As there was no sufficient rainfall after sowing, green gram almost dried up like in other farms and only red gram survived. Kajamma says, all the money they got from the crop was only Rs.4,000 when the investment itself was around Rs. 3,000 for both the crops. While she is in the village she also goes for agricultural wage work besides own-cultivation. Like other women she earned a daily wage of Rs. 30 to Rs. 40 per day depending on whether the work was in dry land, wet land (paddy related work) and/or at a piece rate. She left for Nasik in the month of October after the festival of *Dasehra*.

All through the year when I was in the village, Chennappa was working in Nasik. I met him for the first time in Nasik during the summer of 2007, and talked to him almost every day during my 15-day stay in Nasik. I also visited the building-construction site where he worked. He works as a daily wage labourer in construction under a *tekhedar* (labour contractor), Ram Narayan, who hails from Uttar Pradesh (Narayan started as a *mestri* (mason) and later on started contracting a part of construction work). He was paid a wage of Rs. 180 along with a travel fare of Rs.20 per day (as he shuttles on his bicycle, he earns Rs. 200 a day). Kajamma also worked in construction for a daily wage of Rs.70 apart from the transport fare in the city. She says she gets Rs. 420 per week even if she takes an off from work on the day of payment. She was supposed to return to the village after the month of May for own-cultivation work. This year altogether Chennappa worked the full year in Nasik, Kajamma worked for three months in the village and nine months in Nasik. Their son worked for five months in Nasik for a daily wage of Rs. 90 (does 'tancha' work-chipping off the smooth concrete surfaces before plastering) and their daughter for about two months in Nasik during her vacation from school for a daily wage of Rs. 70

along with her mother. Rough estimates of the income for all the members of the household from wage labour amounts to Rs. 75, 000 and a thousand rupees of profit from own cultivation. Kajamma also owns a goat, gifted by her sister, which is reared by her mother and brothers in the village.

Chennappa proudly claims that his daughter is the only girl in the “harijan wada” (SC ward in the village) to study upto class nine, while a few others who went to school along with her dropped out class seven itself. He says she studies very well while his son, who failed Intermediate (10+2), is not serious in his studies (he was sent back to the village from Nasik to attempt supplementary examination). Both Chennappa and Kajamma would like to send their daughter to school till class ten. Chennappa himself had no formal schooling. He was sent for about one year in the evenings to a private teacher who used to come from a neighbouring village to teach some children in the village. Kajamma also had no education.

While talking about his own education Chennappa reveals the condition of his family during his childhood. Chennappa’s father had inherited very little land – about 3 ‘guntas’ of dry land (40 Guntas make an acre) and a small patch under the tank. He did ‘jeethamu’ (‘attached’ agricultural labour) for 12 years with a *Sakali* family in the village even before his marriage. After which, as far as Chennappa was aware, both his father and mother went thrice for ‘mantipani’ (this work refers to digging and carrying head loads of mud in the construction of dams and canals for which labour contractors used to offer money in advance and take labourers to far-off places for six to nine months in a year. This practice is considered as ‘bonded labour’ and, therefore, illegal). When Chennappa was a child, his parents took him once to ‘mantipani’ to take care of his younger brother. Before which he did ‘jeetham’ for one year with Reddys to rear cattle. One of Chennappa’s brothers also did ‘jeetham’. Later, Chennappa was sent to Mumbai to work. “When there was nothing to eat my parents pleaded with me to go to *Bombai* along with my maternal cousins. I stayed there only for eight days and ran away, and stayed in the village for another year. It was too hard to climb those big buildings with head loads of cement and sand bags. My aunt’s sons were elder to me and strong enough to work. But I could not. I came back to the village. I grazed male buffalos (draft animals) for one year that my father had bought. Day time I used to graze buffalos and evenings I used to go to study”.

Later along with other villagers, Chennappa went to work at Nasik. “It has been twenty five years since I started working in Nasik. At first I was paid a wage of Rs 10 per day. There were people who had come to Nasik some ten years before me. They did ‘coolie’ for Rs 3.50 per day”. Kajamma says “when I first started working in Nasik the daily wage for women was Rs 10”. She started working in Nasikafter four years of her marriage. Chennappa says he saved Rs. 500 those days for his marriage and his parents borrowed another Rs. 1000 for the same. He worked and repaid this debt after his marriage.

The working conditions have changed since he started working in the city. “We used to go and plead with the contractors for work at the construction sites. Now they come to us, seeking for labourers (to the labour point near the *jhopadpatti*). We had to toil hard for long hours. We always feared that they may not employ us the next day. Now a days we know that there are many who would hire us”. Chennappa worked for about 15 years with the same labour contractor who was from Maharashtra. Upon being asked why he hadn’t switched employers, he says “I liked working with him. I didn’t have to worry about finding work every day. I would simply pack my lunchbox and head straight to his work site every morning. He lent me Rs. 10,000 when I needed for the construction of my house in the village. I cleared the amount working with him.” Only recently after this *tekhedar*’s death, Chennappa started working with other employers.

Chennappa and his two younger brothers stayed and worked together at Nasik. “With our earnings my father bought land, constructed a house and bought bullocks”. “We got divided in the year 1997”. Three brothers got about half an acre of land each as their share. Chennappa and Kajamma later bought a ‘jopad’ (shack) at Nasik for Rs 13,000, before which they lived in the same shack for three years paying rent. They also spent Rs 5,000 for house registration. Chennappa also bought land, which presently adds up to one acre of dry land and half an acre of wet land under the tank ayacut in the village. Chennappa’s household has a BPL card in the village. He managed to get one at Nasik too (very few households from this village could manage a BPL card in the cities they live and work in) through which they avail subsidised kerosene (for cooking) and rice. This household enrolled for work under NREGA in the village.

Chennappa's life and his household compared to his father's and his own has witnessed a qualitative change. His household moved upward from class I to class II within the Classes of labour. Like his father he started working as an attached labourer as a child within the village. Except as a child to take care of his sibling, he never went for 'mantipani' under conditions of 'bondage' (the concepts of 'attached' and 'bonded' labour will be discussed later). He initially worked at the lowest level in the work hierarchy in construction with least skills, which includes mostly carrying head loads of construction material. All women and some men in construction do the lowest, or most menial work in the hierarchy, called as *begari*. Later on, he specialised in fixing scaffolding and assisting the labour contractor in construction-related works for which he got a higher wage than a *begari* worker. Consistently earning from wage work in Nasik, he and his wife were able to buy land, construct a house in the village (partly with the support of the government) and also buy a small shack in a slum. They also ensured a minimum education for their children. Chennappa's case is not an exception. Many households witnessed such incremental positive change – slight but perceptible – but not all were so fortunate. For instance, one does not see similar mobility in the immediate case of his two younger brothers. They too work away from the village – one in Mumbai and another in Nasik – along with their wives. They belong to the Class I in the Classes of labour. Neither of them could invest in buying land nor construct a house in the village nor any other productive investment. It is difficult to account for such differences. It is partly due to idiosyncratic reasons (according to Chennappa, they do not work consistently, they spend more on drinking and they have marital issues). Also partly because of kinship support in the case of Chennappa, where his wife's mother and brothers take care of their children and other support in the village, which enables them to work in Nasik. Further, attaining some mobility in the nature of work within manual work through specialisation of skills has a considerable effect on the household income and differences between households.

### **5.2.3 Case study- III (OBC household)**

Gadulula Sayappa (50 years) and wife Eshwaramma (47 years) belong to the caste Telugu or Telugollu (OBC). The educated among the caste, these days, refer to their caste as Muthiraj or Mudhiraj caste, the term used in the urban areas. Sayappa is

originally from Achchampally, a village near Chennaram. Before his marriage Sayappa had stayed in this village, employed on a yearly wage - 'jeethamu'.

Hussenamma and her late husband, Eshwaramma's parents, had three daughters. They arranged *aillitem* marriage between Eshwaramma and Sayappa (matrilocal marriage in which the son-in-law assumes the wife's family name and performs a *man's* duties (as in the patriarchal family) in the absence of a son or when the son is too young for such a role).

Sayappa and his wife were working at a building construction site in Hyderabad in the year 2006 up until March 2007. They started working from the beginning of the monsoon in the city. They own five acres of land and a borewell that irrigates part of this land. They gave out their land for sharecropping to a 'sakali' family, which lives adjacent to their house. Their elder son Raju went to Bombay at the same time, where his sister and her husband were working. He stays with them and does 'coolie' in building construction. He passed class seven and dropped out. Sayappa's younger son, Naresh, is studying in class eight in a government-run school in the nearby village, which is around 2 kms from Chennaram. He walks to the school like some other children studying in that school. Hussenamma takes care of Naresh and does own-household work. During my visits to her house she was mostly at home, and given her age, I was convinced about her work status - 'household domestic work'. By this time most of the wage work for the *kharif* crops was over. But later when the transplantation work for the *rabi* paddy crop was on, I saw Hussenamma in the fields engaging in transplantation work for wage. Old women, unlike old men, do not become completely dependent but contribute to domestic work, at the least, till their last days. They play the important role of taking care of children at home when both men and women in their prime, work away from the home/village. Given that women are usually younger when married, one finds many old widows actively contributing to the household (economy).

Sayappa came to the village for three days at the end of December (2006), while his wife was still working in the city. When I first met Sayappa on the last day of this visit, I saw he himself struggling to pull one of his teeth out with lineman's pliers to get rid of severe tooth ache. I could not be an 'observer' to this event, but advised him to stop and try some pills. He stopped as the attempt has only aggravated

his pain. After this visit, Sayappa and Eswaramma both returned to village in March 2007 for *Ugadi*. In between, Eshwaramma returned to the village once and stayed for about 15 days as she was ill. Altogether they worked for about nine months in the city. They worked with the same *mestri* all this time and lived at the same site, in a building that was underconstruction. Because the shelter was provided, the couple was paid Rs. 150 (in 2006; Rs.90 for male and Rs.60 for female) which was later increased (by Rs. 10 each) to Rs. 170 (in early 2007). (The next year when I visited others from this village working in Hyderabad, engaged in similar work in construction, men were paid Rs. 220 and women Rs.170, but they stayed independently in rented houses in slums. Wages increased at a higher pace in the city of Hyderabad during these years compared to Mumbai and Nasik. Some of the Reddys from this village who used to work in Mumbai shifted to Hyderabad citing this as one of the main reasons). Sayappa and Eswaramma went along with a few others (SCs) after a *madiga* youth who was working at this place (Lalabhai colony in Hyderabad) informed them about the availability of work. A *sakali* family too had worked there and returned to the village. Others from this village who worked at the site along with Sayappa moved out to work elsewhere but Sayappa and Eswaramma continued there. Given their age and having no plans of working long term in the city, they preferred to stay at the same site. Staying at the work site, residing in the shelter provided by the labour contractor and working exclusively under the same contractor is least preferred by many. But this arrangement is considered convenient by those who choose to work for short durations, and/or those who are old enough to rent a dwelling and wait for work and negotiate wage at the labour market on a daily basis.

By the end of the year Sayappa and Eswaramma managed to repay part of their debts, about Rs. 15, 000. They cleared the debt with K.Reddy and took a fresh loan of Rs. 20,000 to repay smaller amounts that he borrowed from others. Besides this, they were left with another debt of Rs.12,000 with J.C. Reddy. This was due to their second daughter's marriage and sinking borewells.

“We married off my first daughter seven years ago and the second one five years ago.” The expenditure incurred for the elder daughter's marriage was not so much, we offered Rs. 5000 (dowry) besides other expenses. The bridegroom's family bore the expenses for the wedding ceremony. For the younger one we offered

threetholas (1 *thola*=11.663 grams) of gold and 50 *tholas* of silver. A ‘thola’ of gold cost us Rs. 7,750 and 50 ‘tholas’ silver cost Rs.5000 at that time. We also gave one brass pot, one brass tray, one brass vessel for wedding rituals. The wedding ceremony was at the groom’s residence”, said Sayapa.

The next couple of years after this wedding they got further indebted because of borewells. About fifteen years ago Sayappa’s father-in-law Hussenamma’s late husband) in partnership with his brother had dug an open well for irrigation. It irrigated more than five acres of land, which was shared between the two families. This well dried up after other borewells were sunk in nearby fields. Then couple of years later Sayappa’s family on their own attempted twice to sink a borewell but failed. It cost them Rs. 18,000 (Rs.9,000 for each failed attempt). They made a third attempt a year later. This time Sayappa consulted a ‘doshaiah’ (Brahmin) to know his fortune and the auspicious time to drill a borewell. ‘Doshaiyah’ suggested that none of his family members’ names were favourable for a successful borewell. He asked for the names of his close kin and suggested that Sayappa’s brother’s son (who lives in a nearby village) is most suited. He also suggested an auspicious day to initiate the drilling. Accordingly Sayappa invited his brother’s son to perform *puja* (the ritual) before initiating the drilling. As was promised to Sayappa, a Reddy suggested the spot in the field for the borewell. Sayappa describes his tense moment while drilling the borewell:

“My mouth went dry, thinking that I dug two borewells before and what would be the fate this time. I prayed to several Gods. After drilling 40 feet, it encountered a rock layer for five feet. I thought everything is finished and this too will fail. After going further deep water gushed out and everyone and everything around got drenched. From 90 feet onwards it faced the rock again. We continued for another five feet but the rock did not end. I decided to stop at that level as everyone around said that this rock may not end and no point of wasting more money when there’s already enough water coming out”. It cost Rs. 36, 000 to set up this borewell (Rs.12,000 for drilling, 4000 for laying pipeline and 20,000 for pump set). “It is still running well.

To repay the debts, at first Sayappa’s wife and son went to Pune to work, while he stayed back in the village to cultivate land. One year passed and the interests

on the debts were accumulating. So he sold off his pair of bullocks for Rs. 13,300, repaid part of the debt. Sayappa and Eshwamma then went to work in Hyderabad while their son went to work in Mumbai. They got hardly anything from sharecropping. The borewell motor had to be repaired thrice. The third time it cost Rs. 3,300. Sayappa's mother-in-law and the sharecroppers sold the paddy they harvested and spent it in repairing the motor the third time. The *sakali* household that undertook sharecropping of land did so because they stayed back in the village this year. They too use to work in the city as well.

Sayappa did *jeetham* with a golla family before his marriage. Later, after his marriage, he did *jeetham* with Mali Patel Basi Reddy (father of Chenna Reddy) for two years. This was about 25 years ago. Then the yearly wage was Rs. 200 along with food, clothing and sandals (Sayappa's mother-in-law says it was more than Rs.200 then, while Sayappa insists that it was only Rs. 200). The contract of *jeetham/gaasam* was usually for two years with the wage paid in advance for two years. Sayappa took an additional Rs. 400 as debt beside this two year wage. He served two years for Rs. 400 and cleared the debt. "I honored the word (contract) and moved out of *jeethamu*". He cleared the remaining debt from the advance he took from a labourcontractor for *mantipani*. Both Sayappa and Eswamma served in *mantipani* for four months for an advance wage of Rs. 600. "The wage was Rs.600 for a 'jodi' (couple) for four months". "We worked for four months and honored our word (promise)". Sayappa repeatedly stresses this quality of honoring the contract or word, whether it was in *jeetham* or *mantipani* or working with the *mestri* in Hyderabad or repaying his debts. The quality of honouring or keeping one's word is often invoked as a moral standard which shapes one's trustworthiness and creditworthiness. Those who broke the contract of *jeetham* in between or who ran away without informing the employer or default the repayment of debt in the village mostly repay the remaining wage/debt, but at a later time. Thus, they challenge the employer and the conditions of employment or breach the terms of debt, but also try to regain one's own trustworthiness in the village over a period of time.

After this four-month *mantipani* away from the village they never left the village for work for about twenty years. They were engaged in own cultivation. After digging the openwell, they continued as self-employed in agriculture, while women

worked for agricultural wage when there was no work in their own fields. After the openwell became dysfunctional and debts incurred with borewells, the members of this household moved to Pune, Hyderabad and Mumbai for two years. Sayappa says both he and his wife have become physically weak because of the construction work. Eswaramma's work like any woman in construction was to carry head loads of bricks and the mixture of cement and sand. Sayappa was mostly given the work of mixing cement and sand with a hand shovel/spade. But at times he had to carry in a day ten to twelve bags of cement (a bag weighing 50 kg). After nine months of work in the city and repaying part of the debts they have decided to stay back in the village and cultivate their land on their own. They returned in the month of March so that there is couple of months' time left for preparing land for sowing. Sayappa says that the *mestri* wanted us to return after the festival of *Ugadi*. He even offered to lend money if Sayappa needed (implying, without having to mention, that this offer was an advance/debt against which they were expected to return and work). Sayappa refused the offer and told the *mestri* that if their condition at home demands they would return for work. Sayappa expresses hope that while he revives his cultivation, his son (who works in Mumbai and stays along with his sister and brother-in-law) would rescue them from the debts. "He has grown up. His work is less tough, physically less taxing than ours (in construction). He is working and learning under those who do flooring work with tiles and stone. His situation is better. They take him in a Tata Sumo to the work place and bring him back in the evening. He is paid Rs. 150 per day, I was told. I have never been there".

"I cannot afford to buy bullocks now. Even the weak and old ones cost no less than Rs.10,000. I will manage tillage of land by hiring a tractor and *badigas* (a man along with his bullocks and implements who hires out for ploughing and harrowing)".

This household with three of its members continuously engaged in wage work so far this year resembles the earlier two cases of Hanmanth (OBC) and Chennapa (SC) in terms of owning land but mostly hiring out for wage work. The size of land too is similar to that of Hanmnathu's household. But the fact that Sayappa's household owns a borewell that is still successfully running sets it apart in Class III of 'classes of labour' from the earlier two (class II). Given the couple's age and having a borewell, they choose to stay back and cultivate their land. However, their household

economic situation and the possibility of cultivation too depend on the continuous wage work of Sayappa's son in the city as well as the wage work of the couple in the village.

In summary, this chapter first engaged with the problem of suitable categories to understand socioeconomic segmentation of households based on their position in production process. It was shown that while caste is an important category, households do not exhibit clear distinction in economic roles from one another based on caste. There is commonness as well as variation between different castes with respect to ownership of land and the nature of work – whether in wage work or own-cultivation. Therefore, households are categorised using the concept of class based on land and labour and other criteria such as drawing rent (through tenancy), interest (money lending), formal sector employment and self-employment. While the supervisory/rentier and farmer classes are exclusively located in 'upper' caste, those who predominantly depend on wage work besides own-cultivation are present across all castes, but more among the 'lower' castes. In other words, certain classes cut across all castes while some classes are drawn largely from some castes.

It is also shown that while more than 95 percent of the households own land, only very few are solely dependent on land. At individual level, only 13 percent are cultivators, as in self-employed in agriculture. At household level, more than three-fourths of households engage in wage work inside and outside agriculture/village despite owning some land i.e. 'classes of labour. Only about 10 percent of the households are farmer/cultivator households that employ more hired labourers compared to household labour.

Detailed case studies of households that represent this large category of classes of labour are presented in order to show how household economy is organised, their everyday struggle, and segmentation within this class based on land and the nature of work within casual wage work.

In each of these cases like other migrant households migrant incomes are very crucial in repaying debts, house construction, and everyday consumption. The effort to improve cultivation is also depicted. In case of Chennappa (SC) it was shown how migrant work contributed to buying of land, construction of house, and in sinking a

borewell in Sayappa's case and repaying debts in Hanmanthu's case. Further, most importantly, in all the three cases within their life time, they have moved from dependent labour relations i.e. *jeetham* to independent wage work. In case of Chennappa and Sayappa, the next generation is acquiring skills within manual work. In other words, there is qualitative change within a generation and between generations which is largely contributed by migration to cities. These case studies depict incremental changes in the lives of 'backward' castes.

### **Agricultural labour: Decline in dependency relations**

This chapter attempts to map the trajectory of change in the forms of labour while at the same time document the current trends within the village. It first deals with the division of labour based on the traditional occupations of various castes and the arrangements with respect to their transactions and the changes therein. This more or less corresponds to the area of *jajmani* relations referred to in anthropological village studies. Second, it deals with arrangement where individuals were tied to a particular landed family in their labour service, which was called *attached* labour and mostly considered as bonded and unfree labour. Third, it discusses *casual* labour, based on daily wage and also the trends of feminisation and more recently, de-feminisation of agricultural wage labour. Fourth, it discusses the emergence of household labour as the predominant labour form in the context of emergence of small farms along with mechanisation in agriculture. Finally, it also deals with the changing nature of tenancy pointing to the decreasing significance of the sharecropping arrangement and the possible signs of the increasing significance of fixed-rent tenancy.

#### **6.1.1 Traditional occupation of castes and economic interactions**

Literature on Telangana, as discussed in Chapter 2, suggests that various castes or families from various occupational castes rendered labour services to cultivating and other caste groups in the past. One form bears resemblance to the *jajmani* relations, and the other one was state sanctioned to facilitate the internal administration of the village in line with the traditional occupations and social hierarchy. *Yetti* or *begar* was state sanctioned and evolved as the most coercive form with the local officials wielding economic and political power over these labourers. Dhanagare's (1983) characterisation of *yetti* as a "Telangana variant" of the widely practiced "*Hindu jajmani system*" was misplaced, ignoring the existence of the former..

S.C Dube (1954/1967:58), without any reference or comparison or invoking a local term equivalent to the *jajmani* system, based on his study in 1951-52 in

Shamirpet village discussed the economic system of the village and the positions of various castes in it. He notes that “most of the castes have a major craft or occupation which is their traditional monopoly” and the “community is organised” with “mutual obligations and expectation” in their economic interactions “within the caste network” (ibid). However, he also pointed that certain occupations are not “wholly exclusive” and members of various castes can and are “free to exploit” other sources of livelihood, such as cultivation of land or to work as field labourers (ibid: 57-58). Dube’s Shamirpet was no exception. Paul G. Heibert<sup>127</sup> in the 1960s and Janet Benson in the 1970s actually used the term *jajmani system* to define the inter-caste-dependency relationships that existed in this region based on their village studies. Dube observed four types of economic interactions and obligations that involve rendering “occupational services” in return for payments or other “traditional services” in which most of the castes “accept a basis of reciprocity in the discharge of their functions”: “(i) Obligations to render to the agriculturists...having a direct bearing on their agricultural activities...(ii)Obligations to render some occupational services, to the agriculturists as well as to many non-agriculturists, having a bearing on their socio-religious life...(iii) Obligations to render some occupational services to other occupational castes in return for their traditional services...(iv) Occupational services rendered with an expectation of cash payment in return for the work...” (S.C.Dube, 1954/1967: 58-59). Such an arrangement followed “a system of attachment of some families with certain other families” in their economic dealings and other obligations (ibid: 60).

Besides the role of caste in this economic arrangement, there were administrative or “semi-government functionaries” i.e. village officials and menials, and the nature of work of these various functionaries was based either “in the field of their caste monopolies”/ caste occupations or in the social hierarchy of castes (ibid: 50, 58). Heibert (1971:92) called this “system that links families of certain castes to

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<sup>127</sup> Heibert (1971:81) employed the term *jajmani system* in his study, conducted during the years 1963-1965 of Konduru village (also located in Mahabubnagar district), to define the “enduring relationships” between individual families with “certain rights and obligations with respect to each other” which are “based upon caste monopolies”. He observed that “[l]and ownership is at the center of the *jajmani* system...*Jajmani* links farmers or *jajmans* to craft and service castemen (*kamins*) in a hereditary system of mutual dependence. The nature of the relationship varies with the rank and wealth of the *jajman*.” (ibid:81-82)

the village in a network of hereditary government service” as “*begar*”.<sup>128</sup> The village officials, namely the *police patel*, *mali patel* and *patwari*, enjoyed large tracts of rent-free land granted by the state for their duties and/or received a certain share of the revenue collected in the village<sup>129</sup>, and they were mostly drawn from the dominant sections or higher castes in the social hierarchy. Of the village menials or *kamgars*, some were paid monthly salaries and some were granted a small piece of rent-free land called as *inam*<sup>130</sup> (an Urdu word meaning gift or reward). In return they performed part-time jobs, and some of them were paid grain by cultivators during harvest time (Dube, 1967:51-52)<sup>131</sup>. Their “functions” in the village are of two kinds: “routine duties in the everyday life of the village and special duties connected with the arrangements which have to be made for the touring government officials arriving in the village” (ibid)<sup>132</sup>. While these were the assigned duties of village menials, this system was subverted, at least in certain areas, to render unpaid service to big landlords like *deshmukhs*, as the literature on Telangana uprising (1946-48) suggests. Tirumali (1992:478), like others mentioned in Chapter-2, observes that though

<sup>128</sup> He adds, “[t]oday *begar* is dying out, but it still functions in Konduru in a limited fashion” (ibid:93).

<sup>129</sup> Dube’s study of Shamirpet reveals that the “recognized headman of the village” called the Deshmukh in Shamirpet held both the offices of Mali Patel and Police Patel (although “his agents” carried out these duties in practice) (Dube, 1967: 50-51). His family was the “biggest single land-owner” that held 800 acres of land, of which two hundred and ten acres of “rent-free” land was granted to him by the State (ibid: 50, 72). Dube notes, “[h]e belongs to the Reddi caste which is the dominant section of the group of agricultural castes in this area” (ibid:72). These offices are known, from other studies and in my own field area, to be held by two different families; and these belonged mostly to the Reddy caste. Patwari in Shamirpet was a Muslim. He had no rent-free land but held around 250 acres of land jointly with his brother. A certain share of the land revenue was fixed by the government for his work (ibid: 51). Police Patel and Mali Patel too received a fixed share of the land revenue collected in the village besides the rent-free land granted for holding these offices. Tirumali (1992:478), however, observed, in general in Telangana, that “the patel could belong to any caste but the patwari was invariably a neogi Brahman”. The patel and patwari (the village officials) were “the dominant group” of villages and below the landlords (*deshmukhs*) in the hierarchy (ibid).

<sup>130</sup> Hiebert (1971:93) notes that the terms on which *inam bhoomi* (*inam* land) was granted were “usufruct” rights – “the right to use an object of property without possessing a title of ownership to it”. “*Inam bhoomi* in the past could not be sold. The holder had full rights to till the soil himself or to rent it to others so long as he fulfilled his *begar* tasks”(ibid)

<sup>131</sup> Dube (1967: :51-52) notes, their “functions” in the village are of two kinds: “routine duties in the everyday life of the village and special duties connected with the arrangements which have to be made for the touring government officials arriving in the village”.

<sup>132</sup> Of the fourteen different village menials or *kamgars* in Shamirpet, there were *Yettis* from Sakali and Madiga castes. “Sakali Yettis” performed “most of the superior kinds of menial work” and “Madiga Yettis” had to do “all sorts of odd jobs of an inferior nature” (ibid: 53). He does not specify if they were granted any rent-free land, but notes that the “Yettis are not paid any salary for their work, and the nominal payments made to them by the touring officials bear no proportion to the work done by them” (ibid: 53). Hiebert (1971:92), however, notes in general that “[b]egaris, or workers, are required to perform certain tasks for the village in exchange for the right to use certain gift lands called *innam bhomi*”.

*inam*lands were granted to certain families of service castes to facilitate professional services in villages, landlords converted this arrangement to “forced *vetti* labour”.

The economic exchanges in the first kind of arrangement between families of various castes had an element of “reciprocity” and “mutual obligations” as noted by Dube resembles the *jajmani* relations in India. Whereas, the second aspect of village organisation with families of certain castes being *villagemenials*, serving the village as well as village officials and other government officials was considered as a highly exploitative form of labour service, as described Chapter-2. *Yetti* or *begar* or “free compulsory service”, being considered as the most exploitative form of labour service relates to the second aspect of village organisation enforced by the ‘semi-government’ administrative structure and not to *jajmani* relations that existed between cultivators and other artisan and service castes<sup>133</sup>.

Discussions with old people in the village about the past revealed that Chennaram exhibited these features/arrangements in economic exchanges between families and castes and the administrative structure and village menials more or less as observed by Dube in Shamirpet. All the castes are identified with their traditional occupation and some or all of the families pursued those occupations. But only some of them can be considered as service castes which were attached to certain families in return for payments or services. The castes may be grouped into two categories based on their occupation and the nature of their relationships with others. 1) The castes with hereditary occupations of carpentry (*vodla*), pottery (*kummari*), basket making (*yerukala*), washer man (*sakali*) and the *madigas* rendered their services to other castes in return for payments at the time of harvest. These are artisan and service castes. These castes fit the definition of “service caste” in a restricted sense used by Janet Benson (1976:262) to those (in Mallannapalle village of Telangana region) “who have more or less permanent relationships with specific households of other castes, and who receive grain payments (as well as other benefits) from these households”. 2) Castes identified with traditional occupations that pursued their

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<sup>133</sup> Dhanagare’s characterisation of *vetti* (and *bhagela* system (discussed later)) as “perversions” of the Hindu *jajmani* system and “its Telangana variant” as “highly exploitative” seems to overlook the aspect of inter-caste network in economic organisation of the village as depicted by Dube that resembles the *jajmani system* (Dhanagare, 1983: 185). Rather, mistakenly he attributes the notion of *jajmani system* to the structure of ‘semi-government’ officials and the village menials during the final years of Nizam’s rule in the region as “its Telangana variant” (ibid).

respective occupations, but were not attached or did not need to be attached to any families and had no necessary obligations to serve, nor were thus paid seasonally or annually. They are, for example, toddy tappers (*Eediga* or *Goud*), shepherds (*Golla*) and stoneworkers (*vodde*). Toddy tappers had and still have officially recognised rights to sell toddy in the village. *Voddes* performed their traditional work of stone work on a piece-rate basis whenever someone required them for construction of house or for walls in open wells (to wells from caving in). None of the three families in the village engaged in this work now. They do wage labour in the cities. Similarly, *Gollas* had no obligation of rendering any product of their traditional vocation to any families. They were sought to herd their sheep on the plots of land by cultivators for the sheep-droppings (manure) and were paid based on the number of nights they sought the sheep to be herded. Of the 27 *golla* households eleven of them still rear sheep. Some of these households as well as the remaining households engage in cultivation and wage labour.

Of the five castes in the first group of castes that were attached to families to render their services, some of them stopped their services completely and some continue, but with different arrangements of payments.

The two *vodla* households still continue carpentry work. They bought powered wood cutting machines. Most of their work now relates to making doors and windows for new houses and has less to do with agricultural implements. In the past they used to make wooden ploughs, harrows and other agricultural implements and repair them too. They used to be paid a certain amount of grain based on the number of pairs of bullocks family employed in cultivation, which in turn was based on the size of landholding of a cultivator household. This means if a family had a pair of bullocks, they would be required to make and maintain a plough, a harrow etc which would be drawn by one pair of bullocks. Anything extra, like making a bullock cart or doors for a house, was charged separately. With a drastic reduction in use of bullocks and therefore, bullock-drawn implements, this traditional arrangement with many cultivator families has ceased to exist. Now they mostly charge a piece rate for implements. Interestingly, two men (brothers) from the *eediga* caste learnt carpentry work from these traditional carpenters and engage in this work in the village without

any objection from the *Vodla* caste members. One of them also does iron works, mostly related to agricultural implements. They too charge a piece rate for their work.

Of the 17 *sakali* (washerman) households, only four have women washing clothes in the traditional arrangement for *reddy* caste families. They are paid a certain amount of grain during the harvest of major crops. Only the elderly women in these families seem to continue to do this work for a few families, while others have stopped. But laundry work seems to continue, like in the cities to be done by the same caste people. One *sakali* household (wife and husband) started and continue to do laundry work in the village and charge money for the same. Members from four other *sakali* households do laundry work in Dharavi (the largest slum in Mumbai)<sup>134</sup>. Majority of the working members of this caste either do wage labour in the cities or cultivation and agricultural wage work in the village.

An elderly couple in one of the two households of the *kummari* (potter) caste occasionally engages in pottery work besides cultivation. The demand for earthen ware has drastically reduced except for some rituals or earthen pots to store water in summer. Some families pay grain during harvests and some pay money and buy them. Once this couple stops this work, the next generation would not continue this vocation as they are wage labourers in Mumbai city.

The lone *yerukala*(ST) household still makes baskets, but on a part-time and on a very small scale at present. They cater to a few households that use baskets for agricultural purposes and for clearing dung in cattle sheds. They are paid grain during the harvest. When this household moved to Mumbai for wage work for five years, they arranged for their kin from a neighbouring village to provide the families in this village with baskets. This lone ST household returned to the village when the *sarpanch* post in the village was reserved for the STs. After returning they once again started rearing pigs (the caste's traditional occupation) and basket making besides the male member's engagement as the *sarpanch* (from the year 2006 to 2012). The

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<sup>134</sup> It may not be an exaggeration to observe that the link between caste and traditional profession in case of washer men caste is reproduced more actively in urban centers than in villages. One not only finds men or families from this caste self-employed in this activity (laundry) as roadside hawkers in residential areas, but often preferred and employed as 'watchmen' in 'modern' residential apartments in the city of Hyderabad to provide the additional laundry service to the apartment residents.

household can't engage full time in basket making, as there is a reduction in the demand as well as reduced availability of the date stalk that is used in basket making.

*Madiga* households were attached to *reddy* households in the past. More than one *madiga* household were attached in case of *reddy* households with large landholdings and especially to the *mali patel* and the *police patel*. Unlike the four occupational castes, mentioned above, that rendered their specialised services to patron families, *madiga* families were attached in two ways to various families. Each *madiga* family attached itself to more than one family (including castes other than *reddys*) to offer caste-specific services like disposing of dead cattle and death related rites like digging graves. Only a few families were involved in leather work. They were free to sell their leather items to anyone in return for money or grain, but were also required to offer some items to the family to which the animal belonged. No family is involved in tanning and leather work or in disposing of any dead animals in recent times. Digging graves is done for wages, without any family being obligated to perform this job even for wages. In recent years there were instances of *madigas* refusing this work for BCs who then had to do it themselves.

The other form of attachment of *madigas* involved either one or more families from this caste being in a regular menial service relationship with a large landholding *reddy* family. These *madiga* families were more or less in exclusive service of particular landholding family. Women used to clean the cattle shed and the front and backyard of the patron's house every morning, and render other unspecified domestic menial work. The client's family members including children, were required to be available for agricultural work or for any other work. In agricultural works they were paid wages equal to other labourers, but were not paid a daily wage or piece rate, except provide food for many specified and unspecified day-to-day works and other contingencies, for either part or for the whole day, particularly during the lean season. These exclusively attached families were paid grain during the harvest of all major crops. These families also had rights over the post-harvest missed/leftover stalk in the fields and the spilt over grain on the threshing floors of the patron.

Attached male agricultural labourers (discussed later), called as *jeethagallu*, was mostly drawn from these traditionally attached *madiga* families, and boys were employed on similar terms for cattle rearing in by the patron families. The origins of

‘attached’ labour and of ‘bondage’ were located in the growing demand for labour and a need for a continuous supply of labour. Its form perhaps was derived and modified from the exclusive form of traditional attachment of landless families involved in menial service to large landholding families. The attached labour (*jeetham*) system also ensured the perpetuation of exclusive attachment of families in menial service. But the latter disappeared even before the *jeetham* system. Cleaning of cattle sheds and yards were then done by those employed on *jeethamu*.

The distinction between two forms attachment or affiliation of families (one of service castes and other of agricultural labourers), as pointed out earlier in this chapter with reference to *jajmani* system, was overlooked by the studies on the *jajmanisystem*. They ignored the importance of the larger body of labour interactions in the villages by ignoring this distinction and the importance of the second type of attachments.

One could derive two kinds of attachment of families from the study of Dube as well. One, given the importance of agricultural activity in the countryside and the relatively small size of various occupational castes and the small number of families pursuing/offering occupational services, each such family attached “itself to a number of families in the village and offered them services both in agricultural pursuits and socio-religious rites and ceremonies” (ibid). Two, landless or land-poor families one or more attached themselves mainly to render agricultural labour services to the cultivating families with large landholdings. Dube too did not focus on this distinction, but includes and discusses in general the attachment/affiliations of some families with other families in the system of economic interactions. One could, however, see this distinction in his study. He notes, as in the case of other occupational caste families, the *madigas* “affiliate themselves to the households of substantial agriculturists in the village”. But the difference lies when he records that “[a]ccording to the size of the land-holding of the cultivator, one or more Madiga families permanently attach themselves to him (ibid: 68). This distinction, as pointed out here, is more or less close to Hiebert’s distinction of two forms of the *jajmani* system in Konduru. Hiebert (1971:89-90) observes that the “*jajmani* system assumes two forms: one is introverted and the second is extended. In the first, a powerful landlord or a small number of related landlords have a group of clients who are

completely within their service...In the second, each jajman is served by clients from different castes, and each client serves many masters.”

The attached labour system (discussed in the next section) entails the labour providing services exclusive to a particular family, which assumes an “introverted” form of affiliation of families, unlike the families that engaged in artisan and other caste-specific services (“extended” form). And, this is why, as Dumont (1988/2009:104-07) noted (and pointed in the last chapter), “the personal relationship of dependency” is “more marked” in ‘unfree’ labour than in other hereditary professions.

### **6.1 Agricultural labour**

There were broadly two forms of wage employment in agricultural activities, which were paid in cash and/or kind (mostly food grains). One was through yearly contract with wage paid in advance and the contract could extend to several years. This form is known locally as *jeetham* or *gaasam*. Only male workers were employed in *jeetham*. The one who is employed in this form is called *jeethagadu* or *gaasagadu*. Adult males were employed in *jeetham* for agricultural work and boys were employed in *jeetham* for rearing cattle. Usually, in Chennaram, when one was employed in *jeetham*, an advance wage for two years or double the amount of yearly wage was sought and paid initially with an understanding that the *jeethagadu* would work at least a minimum of two years for the employer. Accordingly the contract would end after two years with the worker serving against the two year wage. It is rare that the contract would end at the end of one year with the worker repaying the remaining loan and quitting the job. In most cases the worker (or his parents) used to seek an additional loan from the employer within this two year period and, inevitably, he would owe an outstanding loan to the employer at the end of the two years. The initial wage paid in advance was mostly used up by the worker’s family to clear an old debt, or to meet the expenses of a marriage or for other contingencies. The family was usually always in need of consumption loans during the contract period.

These additional loans could be either in the form of money or food grains (food grains were calculated in terms of money at the market price). These additional loans provided had two options of repayment: One was to clear the outstanding loan

at the end of contract-term and move out of *jeetham* from the employer, or the other is to continue to serve in *jeetham* to repay the outstanding amount. The additional or consumption loans were mostly extended by the employer without interest in view of an assurance, at least implicitly, of continuance of labour service by the worker after the initial stipulated term. Given very limited options in the past, the worker mostly ended up continuing *jeetham* with the same employer against the remaining loan or, at the most, sought *jeetham* with another employer and the advance therein is used to clear the debt of the former employer.

The terms of *jeetham* payments included a stipulated yearly wage which was the maximum yearly-wage followed in the village. One could not be paid more than this wage, but less than this common wage was paid to workers who were young or inexperienced or physically weak. This was also the case for the young boys compared to the older boys employed for cattle rearing. The wage had two forms, viz an advance and an ongoing one. Advance was a fixed amount paid in cash and grain. The ongoing payment was in kind. It included food (two or three meals a day), a pair of clothes and footwear. Those working for the long period with the same employer were also offered a *gongadi* (a local-made, multipurpose, long woolen blanket-like garment) and, in some cases, tobacco was given.

The nature of work under *jeetham* in the village in the past as narrated by the elderly matches Iyengar's description of work under this system: "whole-time" service which included "any and every sort of work" (Iyengar, 1931: 13). The major work in *jeetham* for adult males, however, was agriculture-related activities like ploughing and running irrigation (bullock drawn; bullock and pot method), and it was rearing cattle and cleaning cattle sheds for boys. The work was not limited to day time alone. Tilling land (with bullock drawn ploughs and harrows) was a day time activity during monsoon and winter seasons and was an early morning and late-afternoon activity during summers. Irrigation work used to start two to three hours before dawn. Guarding the fields from wild bores was a late night activity. All through the year they were required to do some or the other work related to agriculture like fencing the fields with thorn bushes, shifting the decomposed cowdung (manure) and spreading it in the fields, making ropes, getting agricultural implements repaired or getting new ones made and so on.

The *jeetham* or *jeethagadu* system as it was practiced in the past in this village was also known as *bhagela* system as described by Iyengar and others (as discussed in Chapter-2). Dube mentioned these labourers as “whole-time agricultural labourers” on the basis of “annual contracts”<sup>135</sup> The *bhagela* system prevalent in Telangana was not unique feature of agrarian structure of this region. It occurred across the regions of India with various local names as documented by the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry (1950-51) and this category of long-term farm servants also occurred in the 1921 Census of India. The period of its origin and growth in this region has no clear historical evidence. Iyengar (1931: 13) noted that “this institution has been in existence for a long time”. Tirumali attributes the emergence of servile labour to the evolution of “landlords” over three hundred years before Independence.

However, severe conditions of servitude and expansion of the *vetti* and *bhagela* systems were found to have occurred especially since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after the new patterns of land settlement and the state pushed agricultural production for external markets (Tirumali, 1992). The agrarian reforms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century aimed at increasing revenue by expanding cultivated area through land settlements favoured the “emergence of big landlords” (ibid: 478). The land from peasant cultivators was either grabbed citing non-payment of tax or the cultivators themselves surrendered land unable to pay land revenue. Either the landlords or cultivators with the capacity to cultivate and expand cultivation to barren lands took over land under the ‘*pattaright*’ (ibid). Cultivation of large tracts of land required human labour and this was done through the employment of attached labour. Studies point out that large parts of land held by the big landlords were not cultivated<sup>136</sup>. Monopolisation of land and controlling even barren lands was a way to ensure continued supply of landless labour to cultivate the best part of the land held by landlords. Dube observed that owners of the greater part of the village lands wanted to cultivate the “best fields” by themselves, while leasing out a part of the inferior land to the tenants and leaving part

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<sup>135</sup> “Rich land owners employ labourers on the basis of an annual contract... Rates of payment vary with the age, ability and experience of the person employed; and also partly with the financial position of the employee... Very often the agreement includes the following in the wages for the year: an agreed sum at the end of the year, one or two meals a day or specified quantity of grain every week, and a set or two of new cloths and footwear or a blanket. As a rule, advances are drawn from time to time, and when they exceed the stipulated sum the labourer has to agree to work the following year also to repay the debt” (Dube, 1955: 78-79)

<sup>136</sup> See Balgopal, 1983. He cites Heimendorf’s work and other reports to show the extent of uncultivated land held by the big landlords.

of their land uncultivated (Dube,1967:74-75). He remarks, “we have the paradox of having in the same village many land-hungry families and several hundred acres of uncultivated land” (ibid). This irony, he explains, is because the large holders of land benefit from cultivating the land themselves with the supply of cheap agricultural labour and “if they leased out all their surplus land the cheap labour supply would appreciably diminish” (ibid).

Further, studies on the old forms of tenancy show that one important motif of leasing out land was to ensure the supply of family labour of the tenant. These circumstances, thus, actively contributed to the emergence and continuation of *jeetham*. As noted earlier, Dube described the form of attachment of *madiga* families to the land-owning families to serve all kinds of menial work for grain payment at the harvest<sup>137</sup>. Hiebert also noted this form as an ‘introverted’ *jajmani* relation. It appears that the attached *jeetham* system perhaps emerged to ensure the labour supply not only of the families of the *madiga* caste but also from other castes which were not traditionally attached for menial work. The annual wage in attached labour, if calculated in terms of per day wage, was less than the prevailing daily wage. But the labourer entered *jeetham* because of an advance wage and often for an additional loan

In scarce resource conditions, such attachment not only ensured regular consumption needs, it was a way to meet the expenses of a male member’s marriage in a context of the prevalence of bride price. It would be interesting to explore the possible links between the emergence of bride price and attached labour that involved an advance loan. It was, however, not uncommon that some men would not get married at the ‘appropriate age’ because of the inability to pay the bride price. Both Iyengar and Barucha also record that the loan advanced in the *bhagela* system was for the marriage of the *bhagela*. A male child and adult employed as *jeethagadu*, under the prevailing unequal and scarce livelihood circumstances, not only ensured a certain consumption security for the family but could also afford a bride price and marriage. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hiebert (1971:100) notes that *jeetham* was

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<sup>137</sup> Thus, mostly *madigas* permanently attached themselves to the families of substantial agricultural units in Shamirpet village. These families would be working for the landlord/master through every stage of agricultural production. No daily wage was paid, only during peak work would the master feeds them one meal a day. During the harvest season, the *madiga* family would have to go “begging” to the master. As a convention the master would, once a year, give a new cloth to each member of the *madiga* family.(Dube, 1955:68-69).

considered by the villagers as having higher “prestige value” than “coolie or day labor” among the hired labour.

*Jeetham* continued almost in the same form till about the 1980s in Chennaram. Gadudula Rajappa (*telugu* caste, OBC) who is more than 80 years old says that almost everyone (males) among SCs and *telugollu* in his age group had done *jeetham*. Most of them are not alive anymore. He says, until some 40 years ago, men were ready to do *jeetham* just for food, just for *ambali* (gruel). “The situation was such that if someone fed us, we were ready to work. This was all we could consider... We could not generate a single paisa. People would hang around *reddy* houses in the hope of being called in for some work, so that one would get some gruel or *rotte* (jowar roti/bread). It was worse those days. One should not recall this part of the past.” The old men and women among the SCs and OBCs recall that there was always scarcity of food during their childhood and youth.

Bombai Chennappa and Bhaila Chennapa, both (SCs) in their late 50s, share anecdotes from their past: their fathers, after exhausting all options in Chennaram, used to go to a large landholding *reddy* in the neighboring village to get loans of food grains. As children they used to wait on the outskirts of the village to see if their fathers would return with head loads of grain, and start crying disappointed to see their fathers coming empty handed. The jowar gruel their mothers got for working for *reddy* families during the summers would be diluted with water and served to the children. Their mothers used to manually grind paddy to convert it into rice for the *reddys* and bring home the broken rice along with rice bran for them. The yearly wage during Rajappa’s childhood (possibly before 1950) was about from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 for an adult engaged for agricultural work and Rs. 5 for rearing cattle.

Basi Reddy who was educated till matriculation recalls the past with precise years. He recalls that the village tank bund which had been there since his great grandfather’s time had breached in the year 1962. Many other old people too recall this incident as a reference point in time when mentioning events of the past. Basi Reddy and others recall that by this year people started moving to Mumbai for wage work. And, already, by the 1950s people started working at long distances in canal work (*mantipani*) although not regularly. With more and more people joining *manti pani* and later going to Mumbai for construction work living conditions of labouring

households had started changing in the village. When asked, Basi Reddy, however, says that “no one restricted their mobility because we still had plenty of labour for agricultural work”. His and his brother’s family had five men each in *jeethamu*. The *malipatel* family had more men. His parent’s generation had more *jeethagallu* as the landholdings were larger. The number of families employing *jeethagallu* as well as the laboring families increased, but fewer numbers were employed in most of the *reddy* families with decreasing landholding size after family divisions.

Approximately by the 1970s men started quitting *jeetham* after their marriages and started acquiring land, unlike their earlier generations who did *jeetham* till they were old. For example, Chinna Narsappa, who was in his early 60s during this field work, did *jeethamu* for seven years in his youth but started changing the employers and the villages and bought the first acre of land together with his elder brother. At first he worked with Narsimha Reddy in the village for two years to rear cattle. Then he worked with *reddys* in three other villages for the next five years, one year each in two villages and three in the third. He went to work in other villages, he says, because the yearly wage was higher in those villages. It was Rs. 50 in Goturu (a nearby village), while it was Rs.40 in Chennarm. He says, “for the additional 10 rupees he went to work in other villages”, he was just over 15 years old.

The difference between Narsappa and the earlier generation that marks a qualitative change was this: He got married taking a debt but not under the condition of serving for *jeetham*. He rather(?) cleared off his debt the following year by going for canal work in Maharashtra. He was paid an advance wage of Rs. 90 (along with food) to work for 10 months. Later he together with his brother bought another three acres of dry land. He along with his wife went to Mumbai for wage work and cleared the debt incurred to buy the land. These two brothers, thus, started buying land and by the time they divided the property between themselves each got a share of five and half acres of land. Even after division they dug an open well in partnership for irrigation.

To cite another example, Gadudula Ananthappa (about 60 years old) returned to the village two years before I started fieldwork. He worked for 30 to 35 years in Mumbai doing manual work. Before which he did *jeetham* for 12 years with Basi Reddy and Ananth Reddy (four years with each of these brothers) and with their

sister's family (for four years) in another village. He also went for *matti pani* four times during the summers with his younger brother doing in his *jeetham* work during the months of less intense agricultural work. He did not continue *jeetham* after marriage. He along with his wife and brothers went to work in Mumbai. They cleared debts, bought land and constructed houses in the village.

Almost everyone among SC men above 40 years old reported to have served under *jeetham*, some at least for cattle rearing and most of them for agricultural work during the census survey of this study. Not only SCs, but many among BCs, especially among the *telugu* caste have served under *jeetham*. One from a *reddy* family also reported to have served under *jeetham* for a *reddy* family. A few men from SCs have also worked for cattle rearing with families of *sakali* and *golla* castes. Some of them did *jeetham* in other villages. Gradually, with work opportunities increasing and growing familiarity with working away from the village, only those men who were in need of large amounts started working in *jeetham*. One would by then get a higher advance wage for *matti pani* but the contract was mostly for nine to ten months. Whereas in *jeetham* there was already a convention of paying a two year wage in advance. Besides this two year advance wage, those who needed extra loan continued to work in *jeetham*. As mentioned in the case study of Hanmanthu, his parents got him employed under *jeetham* for an additional loan of Rs. 3,000 besides the two year advance of Rs. 2,000. Except in conditions of severe need of a large debt, everyone started preferring work away from the village or on a casual basis in the village. As in case of Hanmanthu, there were several cases where men started breaching *jeetham* contract. This brought about friction between the employer and the employee families. Taking a loan with the promise of *jeetham* and running away to Mumbai without informing the employer or stopping *jeetham* in between and settling to repay the debt had become a common. Basi Reddy says at least four of them had broken the contracts with him but paid the debt later on. Everyone is known to have repaid the pending debts by taking an advance from a labour contractor or some other moneylender or after working and saving money.

The *jeetham* system started disappearing at a faster pace when men in *jeetham* witnessed the obvious fact that men in their age group were earning in four to six months away from the village what they would in a year. Further, the life and work

that the urban centres offered to young men were found to be more attractive than working mostly alone in the fields and for longer hours without a day off. The employer families had become not only wary of this trend, but many of them were not in a position to lend additional money to those willing to join *jeetham*. In a few cases, the employers lent advances to attached labourer either by borrowing money on interest from money lenders or as ‘crop loans’ from banks. But only a few men in *jeetham* served their full contract term, others left half way.

Robinson (1988) in her Mallannapalle village study in Medak district in south Telangana observed a considerable decline in attached labour between 1972 and 1980 with a simultaneous decrease in ‘control’ of landowners over attached labourers. This declining trend seems to have started a decade early in Mallannapalle owing to the village and local factors such as increasing demand for labour with increasing irrigation and sugarcane production and other local politics, compared to Chennam.

Krishnaiah (1998)’s study of two villages in Mahabunagar district that also pertains to the 1980s (between 1979-80 and 1991-92) exhibits somewhat similar trends but a slower decline in attached labour than that seen in Chennaram. His study of what he called ‘regular farm labour’ (RFL) that corresponds to attached labour or *jeetham*, reveals, although “stagnant” in terms of the share of ‘RFL households’ among the ‘labour households’, “acquired dynamism” from a “personalised system” to an “impersonal system”, with the RFLs changing their employers “almost every year” (ibid: A-25). A closer look at the data presented in his study reveals that he clubs both the categories of RFLs, “herdsmen” (usually boys below 14 years old employed for rearing cattle) and the “ploughmen” (males above 14 years old employed for agricultural work), which distorts the declining trends of adult males (“ploughmen”) in RFL that he actually points out in his analysis owing to migration of adult men in one of the two villages. The decline of men in *jeetham* for agricultural work occurred faster and earlier than boys employed for cattle rearing in *jeetham* in Chennaram too. Although the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (1976) was implemented in the year 1976, the campaigns and rehabilitation measures were undertaken in the early 1980s in this locality too<sup>138</sup> targeting long-term attached

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<sup>138</sup> There were instances of providing relief to bonded labourers in the neighbouring villages. One of the village secretaries appointed for a neighbouring village informed me about the information being

labour involving debt. Attached labour declined more as a result of the availability of non-farm employment and the growing assertion of the labouring households.

By the turn of the millennium even those who were in a position to offer additional loan and bear the risk of men quitting *jeetham* were not finding anyone willing to do *jeetham*. The phenomenon of debt has already become commercialised with interest bringing the parties together. Debt for interest has replaced debt for cheap labour supply or bondage. Those who are in need of debt have moneylenders to approach without having to 'mortgage' any labour service in the transaction. K. Reddy, for example, stopped cultivation and, thereby, hiring of labour. He left part of his land uncultivated and leased out some part for sharecropping, but started lending money.

Even male children being employed in *jeetham* has disappeared. They are either sent to schools or made to work at home, like to rear family cattle. The campaigns against employing child labour too have contributed to the disappearance of child *jeetham* for rearing cattle. During the field work, there were still four cases of *jeetham* in the village. Two of them were employed for rearing cattle and two for agriculture. Only one of them was an SC from this village, while three others are OBCs from the neighbouring village. The latter three boys are siblings who lost their father at an early age and their mother was not in a position to bring them up without having them work. The lone SC boy, Raju, from this village in his late teens after venturing to work in Mumbai fell ill and was hesitant to go back to work away from the village. He too is discouraged by others from doing *jeetham*. One day when I was interviewing Raju while he was at the paddy field overseeing irrigation and grazing the bullocks, the employer's brother approached us and started mocking the boy while telling me that he is not strong and courageous enough to work in the cities like boys of his age. It is intriguing to note such an attitude from a land owner and cultivator who was himself actually hoping to employ a person in *jeetham*. The mocking of Raju reflects the changed attitude towards *jeetham*: the form of agricultural employment

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sought by the higher authorities in order to prepare a status report to the High Court on the rehabilitation for bonded labour undertaken in the past. He was asked to provide information pertaining to a couple of cases if they were in possession of land that was granted as part of their rehabilitation. He and other secretaries together decided to furnish wrong information of land with particular survey numbers that was granted on paper to freed bonded labourers, to avoid any controversy arising from the contrary status in reality.

that once had a “prestige value”, as noted by Hiebert, in scarce livelihood conditions that has now turned out to be the least preferred and least respected form of employment.

This form of labour attracted debate and varied views on its nature and also on the trends of its decline, as discussed in the introductory chapter. Some scholars insisted that it was increasing with employers tying down labour by extending debt in the context of the rising demand for agricultural labour after the *greenrevolution*, a process called as ‘deproletarianisation’ (for example, Brass, 1990). Others showed evidence that not only was there a change in the nature of attached labour, but that it was also declining. Differing from the prevailing notions of attached labour as ‘unfreedom’ and ‘debt-bondage’ Jhodka, for example, considered it as ‘labour mortgage’ in the recent decades (Jhodka, 1998;1999). More recent studies pointed to a further decline and almost disappearance of attached labour (Harriss et al, 2010; Jhodka, 2012). The disappearance of this form of attached labour was not only a destination of the processes of change such as availability of non-farm employment, but it also was a source with far-reaching implications on the life and relations between the castes and between landholding and land-poor households in the village.

The other form of agricultural labour employment was based mostly in daily wage, called as *coolli*. This form is usually referred to in the literature on labour as casual wage employment. The *coolli* form evolved over time, more predominantly with specific work and specific wages. It refers both to the form of daily wage employment and the daily wage rate itself. This casual wage employment took two forms from the late 1970s. One is *coolli* with a specified common daily wage in the village and *gutta* or *thodta* which was based on piece rate or piece work. The word *coolli* at one level is used to distinguish it from *jeetham* and at another level it refers to the form based in daily wage distinct from piece rate/piece work (*gutta*). Both the nature of work as well as the wage had been gendered, where women were paid lower wages both in *coolli* and *gutta* compared to men.

All casual work did not involve a daily wage in the past. Women and men were called to do several part-time chores that were not counted as work to be paid a wage. The varieties of tasks form an exhaustive list. A few are listed here to convey the nature of work: manual grinding of rice, jowar, chillies, etc, when there was no

mechanised grinding; drying of grain and sorting out waste and pests; filling grain in sacks and lifting grain bags while loading or unloading for transportation; repairing cattle sheds and mud plastering of walls occasionally; stacking paddy and jowar stalk used as fodder; several works during ceremonial occasions, and so on.

Such services were based in obligation and the workers were at the most offered some food or some grain. This was Geertzian 'involution' in a way, where labour households were 'treading waters' despite high differentiation in ownership of land here unlike in Java (Geertz, 1963). There was land but productivity of land did not increase along with growing population with no break though in technology. Mostly, the family members of the attached labourer, *jeethagadu*, were required to do such services. The attached labour system not only ensured continuous availability of attached male workers but it also ensured the services of his family members. Even when there was demand for hired labour elsewhere they were obligated to work for the employer family. A specified wage was paid only when the work was full time in the fields and when other hired labourers were involved. Wages were mostly paid in grain but not the processed grain. They were paid specified bundles of paddy stalk or jowar ears and mostly at the time of harvest even if the work was during the cultivation of a crop. Such payment was said to be in practice till about fifty or sixty years ago. Grain lending was in practice during this time. Grain loans were offered by some *reddy* families in this village to be repaid in the harvest season. The interest charged ranged from 50% to 100% percent of the original volume of grain lent, depending on the kind of grain and the crop duration. Grain loans were common in this region and the loan was taken both for seed and for consumption. After the harvest of their small plots of land or the grain earned as wage was used to repay the loans. Post harvest grain payment was replaced with wage in cash during the cultivation time and in grain during the harvest time.

As noted in Chapter-4, the bullock and pot (*motalu*) method of irrigation through openwells was replaced with the introduction of engines run by diesel in the early 1970s and electric power since 1977 in Chennaram. This meant displacement of irrigation work done by male workers by this new technology. However, this new technology expanded intensive agriculture with irrigation which required more male workers, than it replaced, for more intensive ploughing in paddy fields and so on, and

more women workers for weeding, transplantation and harvesting. By this time workers also started migrating out of the village for wage work through the active persuasion of labour contractors lending advance wages that was higher than the agricultural yearly wage. Further, they employed couples for a continuous duration of nine to ten months in a year.

With part of the population of workers moving out of the village on the one hand and the expansion of irrigated agriculture on the other, there was for the first time a growing demand for agricultural labour within the village at least during the peak agricultural activity. This is when the *gutta* system (piece rate) was introduced in agricultural work. It was said to be an initiative on the part of labourers. The employers who continued to insist on the fixed daily wage found that the labourers would resort to lazy work upon being denied piece rate. Labourers on the other hand felt that they could earn more in a day compared to fixed daily wage by which they would get to do more work and earn more wage in peak seasons of work. Employers too started finding this more convenient, given that certain agricultural work needed to be done in time, and stretching such work would affect the crop negatively.

The preference of piece rate over daily wage, however, was not uniform across seasons and across activities. For example, employers preferred daily wage for weeding and piece rate for transplantation. Employers are always reluctant to offer weeding work on piece rate because of the apprehension that labourers would tend to finish this piece work without removing all the weeds properly. Whereas the labourers demand piece rate for all the work during the *kharif* season when the demand for labour is higher and would prefer daily wage during the *rabi* season. This is because the number of labourers per unit work in the *kharif* season tends to be less, given the demand for labour, which results in a higher wage for a day if one works intensively. The piece rate for a unit of work (for example, transplantation or weeding of a paddy field) would fetch lesser wage per head given the tendency of more workers joining to work during the *rabi* season. The extent of cultivation during the *rabi* season crop is mostly restricted to irrigated lands, while the cultivation during monsoon season not only covers drylands but the extent of irrigated crops too would be much higher. This would mean that at times during the *rabi* season piece work would fetch less than the daily *coolii* per head. Because the number of labourers that turn out during lean

seasons would be more than what is actually required, the employers insist on the piece rate for a unit work that was negotiated during the monsoon season while the labourers would insist on fixed daily wage.

The seasonal variation in demand for agricultural labour also demands balancing of attitudes and obligations both on the part of employers and the labourers. However, the conscious attempt of the labourers has been to avoid doing any unpaid tasks unlike in the past. With the decline of attached labour, the family members of such labourers were no more obligated to do unpaid services. Not only did the labourers start asserting a wage for all kinds of work, they avoided certain tasks that were considered as degrading. Work in groups in the fields/outdoors was preferred to individual, odd and domestic jobs. The commanding language had to give way for negotiation and request.

The underlying consciousness was to defy the attitudes that took them for granted as all-time-available servants. Two instances that Chenna Reddy narrates capture this change. In the past he could call any man around to lift grain sacks from his house into bullock carts to take to the market, but now even after his pleas no one would be ready to carry bags to shift into the tractor unless he pays wage to do this work. "When the motor of the borewell had to be pulled out for repairs, we used to merely offer breakfast and take their help. Now we have to pay them a day's wage. Even if it is an hour's work, we have to pay them full wage. It's rare that someone obliges to do even small work without a wage". Not only for such contingencies or odd jobs but in general the large landowners often complain of a shortage of labourers.

It is intriguing that the employers on the one hand complain about non-availability of labour and the labourers complain about the non-availability of work in the village. This has two dimensions. One is the terms and conditions of agricultural employment and the other is the seasonality of agricultural work. Agricultural work with traditional technology of bullocks and ploughs required male labourers to plough land and do other work all through the year. Attached labour was found to be convenient for this kind of work. Whereas the labourers found the wage as well as the nature of work in attached labour unacceptable compared to daily wage work. Employers started experiencing not only a difficulty in finding male daily wage

workers during the peak seasons, but employing male labourers on a daily basis for long time was unaffordable in agriculture. The technology of tractors came handy for the large landowning households. Thus, the most important and major work available for male labourers in agriculture i.e. tilling land, was replaced by tractors. This left only a few other kinds of work in agriculture for men. With very scarce work available in the village/agriculture more and more men joined work away from the village. The remaining men, who cultivate their own plots of land, sometimes offered to do wage work. But because the demand is seasonal, the employers face a scarcity of labour when their need is the most.

This phenomenon of unwillingness of men to do *jeetham* and, mechanisation in agriculture led to the replacement and displacement of men in agriculture. As shown in Table 5.1 and discussed earlier (in Chapter-5), only 15% (57 men) of working men were involved in agricultural wage work besides their own cultivation. Women then became a majority among the remaining workers in agriculture. Nearly 39% (159 women) of the total working women are engaged in agricultural wage work in varying degrees besides own-cultivation.

The predominance of women in agricultural work is termed as *feminisation* of agricultural labour. In a way this term is a misnomer. It was neither a disproportionate addition of women into agricultural labour nor was it that women replaced men. The gendered nature of women's work was mostly intact, while tractors replaced men's work. This process rather is both a replacement and displacement of masculine labour in agriculture. It initially filled in (replaced) the shortage of men and later displaced part of the remaining men. It is another thing that the varieties of non-agricultural work opportunities available for women are limited. Non-farm work spheres are "masculinised" (Harriss-White, 2008). Women's mobility is also curtailed by their domestic responsibilities and patriarchal ideologies, and hence a higher number of female agricultural labourers are in agriculture.

The available number of wage-work days for women in agriculture, however, was scarce, though only 39% of female workers were engaged in agricultural wage work. It varies between households depending on the extent of own-cultivation. There is a demand for transplantation and weeding works during the monsoon season for about two months and then about a month during the *kharif* harvest. Then the major

part of the remaining six to seven months offers only a few days of work during irrigated *rabi* crops like paddy and groundnut. One would witness the obvious difference of attitudes and behavior of employers and labourers between these two seasons. Women from the large landowning households are seen visiting the SC and OBC households during the first season requesting female labourers to join their fields, and in the latter season they would avoid and refuse their requests for work citing reasons of own-cultivation or the obligation to exchange labour with someone else. Only with the assurance of a higher piece rate would landowners get some labourers to work in their fields.

Many a times this shortage of labour during peak seasons results in delays in transplantation and weeding, affecting crop output. It is not rare that crops are abandoned or replaced with another short-term crop as a result of excessive weeds that leaves no scope for the crop. Chenna Reddy recounts that in the previous five years he abandoned crops seven times in a part of his fields due to a shortage of labour for weeding. Post-*kharif* season employers do not have to go in search of labourers, a verbal request would suffice to fetch more number of labourers than they actually required.

I have witnessed such instances in both the seasons. A female labourer would ask another labourer if she can join work and the latter would say that the employer needs only a limited number of labourers, which means she was not required. Yet a more than required number of labourers would turn up at the fields. In view of the consideration of next labour demand season, the employers restrain from denying work and disappointing anyone. But if the number of labourers is excessive to cost the employer more by paying daily wage, then the employer would insist on paying piece rate. Such rate may have been fixed for the unit of area during the monsoon season or by others in the same season. While the labourers, as pointed out above, insist on daily wage.

Once when I visited Madhu Reddy's field during the transplantation of paddy in the *rabi* season, double the number of labourers that his wife actually called for had turned up at the field and started working even before he and his wife reached the field. Usually during the monsoon, labourers would not start work unless an acceptable piece rate is negotiated. In this case they had already started work hoping

to settle for a daily wage. Madhu Reddy insisted on paying a piece rate fixed in the adjacent field (his brother's) a couple of days ago. Given the number of labourers that came, this amount shared per head would turn out to be less than the daily wage. So, they insisted on a daily wage, which for the employer would be a much higher than what was fixed in the adjacent field. After prolonged bargaining both the parties conceded to piece rate slightly higher than the adjacent field. On this day the women got Rs. 30 per head, while the daily wage that year was Rs. 40 in paddy fields and they earned about Rs. 60 on piece rate during the previous *kharif* season.

Thus, the dynamics of the seasonality in demand for labour, the low wages and the long lean periods have already led to 50% of the women workers of the village moving with men to work in non-farm work away from the village, while the large cultivators who faced shortages of labourers during the main agricultural seasons started exploring ways to deal with the situation.

The years after 2005 started witnessing increases in nominal wages in agriculture. The MGNREGA (implemented here in year 2006) on the one hand and comprehensive housing scheme (Central Government housing loans) to cover maximum needy households through the state government's programme of *Adarsha Gramam* (ideal village in 2005-06) on the other provided more wage employment in the village. Although work was offered on and off at a stretch of 10 to 15 days with gap of 15 to 20 days, about 20 to 30 men and women started working in the MGNREGA works. A few households even got more than stipulated 100 man-days of work. Initially, the wages ranged almost around three times more than the daily wage for women in agriculture and later it was around Rs.100. This was more than the daily wage for men in the village, which was then Rs.70. About 50 new house loans were sanctioned in this village and construction work had started from the year 2006. As a result of these two initiatives, and especially the MGNREGA, agricultural wages started increasing in an unprecedented way.

Through my contacts in the village I gathered that by the *kharif* season of 2013, the women's daily wage in agriculture had increased to Rs. 150 in paddy crops and Rs.130 along with toddy (Rs.6) in dry lands, and at times earned about Rs. 200 for piece work. Whereas men's daily wage increased to Rs. 220 in agriculture and Rs. 250 for non-agricultural work. The increase during this period in the village has been

more than threefold for both women and men, which was for the first time a much higher rate of increase than in construction work in urban centres. This increase in agricultural wages and demand for women workers brought about another phase of adoption of technology that replaced human labour. Already during my fieldwork between the years 2006 and 2008, for the first time mechanised harvesters were seen entering villages and the fertiliser and pesticide shops had billboards of new herbicides and weedicides. The major work in agriculture for women was manual weeding and harvesting besides transplantation. Herbicides are of two forms. One form to treat the land a few days before cultivation and other form meant to apply to the crop that selectively kills weeds without affecting the crop. It is said that both these forms are used currently without having to employ women for work. Further, most of the harvest work is done by hiring harvesting machines. Paddy transplanting machines are said to be used in a few villages but have not become popular due to suitability issues. This new technology means a further decline in the number of days of wage work in the village accompanied by a paradoxical increase of wage rates for the remaining works.

## **6.2 Emergence of small farms, household labour, and mechanisation**

From a highly skewed landowning pattern in the village to dispersed and fragmented holdings of land accompanied by growth in the number of households, and sale of land, led to three fourth of the households owning small and marginal holdings (shown in the last chapter) Further, more than three fourth of the households, as discussed earlier in this chapter, belong to the category of *classes of labour* which to varying extents own, and mostly cultivate, land but predominantly engage in wage labour within and outside agriculture. Only less than 10% of the households that own about 20% of the village land do not engage in wage work but do manual work in their own fields. Un-remunerative agriculture in a context of uneconomical holdings pushed almost all households to contribute household labour in their cultivation. The families whose parent generation did not engage in manual work in cultivation also had to engage in manual work.

For example, Basi Reddy or his brother and their wives only supervised cultivation and never engaged in manual work. It was same in the case of *mali patel's* family. Except one of Basi Reddys sons, his sons and his brother sons and their wives

do manual work. With the attached labour system disappearing, every large landowning family had to engage on a daily basis in work from ploughing, spraying pesticides, to watering and guarding fields during the night. With tractors being available on rent they could do away with ploughing and manage most of the other agricultural work themselves. Sowing seeds and leveling after sowing is still done with bullock-drawn implements. Some of them still own a pair of bullocks and others hire *badigas* for this work. A *Badiga* is someone who hires himself out along with his pair of bullocks and the implements for tilling land. Table 6.1 shows the number of households that owned at least a pair of bullocks and other cattle. In the past, maintaining more pairs of bullocks was a status symbol and was proportionate to the land size. The table drawn from the survey conducted during the initial stage of the fieldwork shows that less than one third of village households owned a pair of bullocks and only three households had a couple of pairs. This dwindled with increasing mechanised tilling. Almost all the large cultivating households had cattle (cows and buffaloes) used more for cow dung as manure than for milk.

With the disappearance of children in *jeetham* for rearing cattle, most households sold their cattle and a few managed themselves (presented in Table-6.1). A few households among the OBCs and SCs have children self-employed to rear cattle and some of *Reddy* households pay these children a certain amount per head of cattle to graze them. The latter is a new form that emerged after the prohibition of child labour.

After ploughing was replaced with tractors, cultivation work has become relatively easy to manage for women in the absence of working men, as ploughing was a men's work. Management and financial transactions in agriculture which was mostly a male role is now handled by elderly women or wives in some cases where men or couples in their prime work away from the village. Women from the cultivating households mutually exchange labour and hire women only when extra hands are needed during weeding and transplantation. They work extra hours compared to hired labour. This is true of household labour in cultivation across all households.

In the past, the small and marginal holding households were not in a position to give first priority to self-cultivation. Given the scarcity of resources, they

prioritised wage work over self-cultivation. With incomes from non-farm away from the village, they are now able to invest in cultivation and engage in it on priority. This change had created a further shortage of hired labour during peak seasons of agricultural activity is same for all sizes of farms. Except a few households that depend mainly on hired labour, most of the women agricultural workers mutually exchange labour in their respective farms for long hours, and then free themselves to hire out for wage labour.

Interestingly mechanisation not only helped the large landowners but also labouring households who used to depend on landowners for bullocks for ploughing their fields in return for their labour. They too started hiring tractors with the incomes earned from non-farm work. The middle-range cultivators who were previously tied down in the village to maintain bullocks in the lean period could dispose them off and join wage work in the cities, and hire tractors for ploughing instead.

A few men especially the SCs and OBCs and some from the OCs who owned bullocks are now in demand to hire themselves out as *badigas* during the sowing season. The daily wage for a *badiga* was Rs. 250 in the year 2006 which increased to Rs.600 by 2013. The hourly rent for tractor for tilling in dry land was Rs. 200 and in wet land was Rs.300. It has increased to Rs.600 and Rs.1000 respectively. Thus, cultivation across all landholding sizes depends now mostly on both household labour and hired machinery, and other new technologies like herbicides. There is an increasing effort to reduce household labour in own-cultivation by these smallholding landowners in order to increase their time in wage work away from the village. In this direction, bullocks and cattle are sold to free themselves for migrant wage work. Machinery has come handy, even if costly, to reduce their time in self-cultivation. Part of the migrant remittances is in turn used to engage machinery. They are also used to increase productivity by increasing use of fertilizers and other inputs, and making long term investments like in sinking borewells.

The emergence of small farms is, therefore, not akin to the ‘peasant’ households engaged in ‘subsistence’ cultivation employing household labour. These households employ household labour along with increasing use of machinery and also hire-in labour occasionally. Thus the significant trend in this backward agricultural region is increasing use of technology also by the small landowners and ‘displacing’

its own household labour in cultivation. Except 10 households among the ‘farmer’ class who do not engage in wage work within or outside village all the households that cultivate land (except a few salaried and a couple of rentier households as discussed earlier in this chapter) have all or some of their members engaged in wage labour and most of them in the non-farm sector away from the village. These households are therefore not cultivator or peasant households, but *classes of labour* depending mostly on wage labour and are also owners and cultivators of small farms.

**Table 6.1:** Caste wise households owning bullocks and other livestock

Community	Pairs of Bullocks	Buffalos/Cows	Sheep/Goats/Pigs
SC	11	9	0
ST	0	0	1
BC	30	20	14
OC	31	29	0
Total	72	58	15

**Table 6.2:** Caste-wise no. of households that leased-in and leased-out lands, and land left fallow

Community	Leased in for sharecropping	Leased out for sharecropping	left uncultivated
SC	2	7	10
ST	0	0	0
BC	11	13	21
OC	7	6	11
Total	20	26	42

### 6.3 Decline of sharecropping

As discussed in Chapter-2 tenancy was a major phenomenon at least in some parts of this region. The *A.P (Telangana area) Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1950* (amended in 1954) was considered to be “radical” and granted tenants “greater rights and protection” in the region compared to the *A.P. (Andhra Area) Tenancy Act 1956* (even after its amendment in 1974) (Govt. of AP, 2006: 25-32). Perhaps this act and other land reforms in the region had a certain impact for the decline in tenancy in

this region compared to the Andhra region. Later studies in the region also point out that tenancy prevailed more prominently in irrigated delta regions than in the dry regions (see Govt. of AP, 2005). In the early 1950s itself Dube's village study in this region pointed to a low incidence of tenancy.

There was no clear pattern of tenancy nor was it a substantial aspect of agriculture in the village during the field work. It was not a pattern of landless or land-poor households leasing in land from the land rich, nor was it *vice-versa*. The former pattern was found in case of only two households that are categorised in the Table.5.2 (discussed earlier) as 'supervisory/rentier' class, which leased out part of their lands and left part of them uncultivated (these households own between 10 to 15 acres of land). One of them was cultivating with own tractor, in the year I started field work, and the next year, they sold the tractor (this household is said to have become bankrupt). This household leased out part of the land for sharecropping and part of it was left uncultivated. Except in the case of these two households, sharecropping was mostly a convenient arrangement for households that lease in and lease out. As mentioned in the case study of Sayappa, when the working couple went to Hyderabad for wage work in construction, the part of their land that is irrigated was leased out for sharecropping. The dry part of the land was not cultivated by the household that leased in. The latter household used to work in Mumbai but stayed back in the village that year for other reasons and chose to lease in land. To cite another example, two *reddy* households (male members are brothers) got indebted after sinking borewells and also incurred debt to construct separate houses after their division. They leased out their lands to OBCs from the neighbouring village and the couples in both the households started wage work in Mumbai. Similarly, as shown in Table-6.2, 26 households across castes have leased out land and 20 households leased in land, and 42 households left part or whole of their lands uncultivated. The amount of land leased out is less than the land left uncultivated. A recent study also shows the two villages surveyed in the district have low incidence of tenancy which was less than 10% compared to the total land owned or operated (Vijay and Srinivasulu, 2013).

In the past, the terms of sharecropping involved sharing of investment other than the labour charges and the produce was shared equally by both the parties. The tenant had to invest his own labour as well as bear other labour charges. Productive

land, especially the irrigated land, was not leased out by the landowner. It was only some unproductive dry land that was leased out in order to keep the land under cultivation and use the tenant and his bullocks in preparation of paddy fields of the land owner that required intensive ploughing. With growing disinterest in sharecropping by the tenants the terms were changed to include harvesting charges to be shared by both the parties. Given the uneconomical nature of dryland agriculture, the land came to be leased out for the reason that the land should not be left barren with least interest in investment or output.

The migrant labour households leased out mainly for two reasons. One is not to leave land fallow because bringing the same into cultivation becomes difficult after leaving it barren for long. The other is with the hope of receiving some food grain at the end of cultivation. Most the households that leased out were engaged in migrant work. To invest in sharecropping one has to share the risk of uncertainties in crops. The usual complaint of the absentee landowner is that the tenant does not manage things in time giving priority to his own land, which results in low output and losses.

Now with mechanisation, if one member of a household stays back in the village during the monsoons, he or she can handle cultivation if one is in a position to invest. The sharecropping system is said to be declining although it was not rampant in the past too. The new form of tenancy that is said to be picking up momentum is fixed advance rent. The same *reddy* brothers who leased out land on sharecropping are said to have leased out on fixed rent paid in advance to the neighbouring villagers. The fixed money rent in this case and a few others is said to be Rs. 2, 000 for dry land and Rs.4,000 for wet land per year. Decline in sharecropping and increase in fixed-rent tenancy is found to be the trend at large in recent years (Reddy and Shaw, 2012).

In summary, the focus of this chapter has been the changing labour relations in the village. Traditional *jajmani* relations have declined. A few castes continue their traditional caste based occupations like washermen and carpenters. But the nature of payments has changed. Carpenters engage in furniture and other housing related works and very less in making agricultural implements as machinery replaced bullock drawn implements.

Most significant change occurred in the forms of agricultural labour. The attached labour which was called as *jeetham* or *bhagela* system in this region has almost disappeared in the village. This was brought about by the decreasing control of cultivator families on the labourers. Fragmentation of landholdings among the large cultivator families resulted in the weakening of their economic position. The migrant work away from the village provided an opportunity to break away from 'bonded relations in the village. In this context cultivators started employing tractors to substitute male labourers. Increasing migration of women resulted in shortage of labourers during peak agricultural seasons. This has prompted labour replacing technologies like mechanized harvesters and weedicides in the recent years. As a result there is a decline in the wage work in terms of number of days, but the wages have increased for both men and women in agricultural work.

Further, the most significant development is employment of labour replacing technologies by the small land owners to increase their wage days away from the village. This has reduced household labour among the small holders of land. Now cultivation is managed with household labour along with new technologies across all sections. There was move away from cultivation leaving land fallows among some of the small and marginal owners, especially since the severe droughts of 2002-2004 But there were significant efforts to restore cultivation even among the most marginal landholders. This was possible among most of these sections due to migrant remittances.

## Chapter-7

### Circulation of Labour

Migration of labouring households from Chennaram does not involve a permanent relocation of households from the village to urban centres or to places where members of the households engage in wage work. Nor is it an everyday commute of the working population from the home village to a proximate town. It is also not a displacement of labour resulting from what Marx observed - “the expropriation of the agricultural producers, of the peasants from the soil” (Marx, 1967: 716 cited in Shrestha, 1988). It resembles the phenomenon during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Western countries as analysed by Kautsky in his famous *Agrarian Question*, when “the most important” form of labour migration occurred “without expropriating the small farmers, without breaking their tie to the land”, where “the peasant appears to remain as a peasant” (Kautsky, 1899/1988:191-97). Alavi (1987), drawing from an earlier English translation (1966) of Kautsky’s *Agrarian Question*, notes his contribution in understanding the role of ‘peasant societies’ in relation to ‘capitalism’. This, in Alavi’s words, is the recognition that “[t]he role of peasant societies as reproducers of labour power had a special advantage for capital, for in this case the main cost of reproduction of labour power is borne by the peasant societies, and wages can be lower than those needed to maintain a permanently urbanized working-class family” (ibid:192). “This recognition by Kautsky”, Alavi remarks, “was a major advance over earlier conceptions of the production and reproduction of free labour for capitalist exploitation”<sup>139</sup>. Further, one also finds that Kautsky recognised the other important aspect in this relation i.e., the role of non-farm incomes in ‘peasant’ economies (Kautsky, 1899/1988)<sup>140</sup>. He observed that the spatial labour mobility sustains and invigorates the small farms; it subsidises the reproduction costs of small-scale farming:

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<sup>139</sup> “The best conditions for bringing up a plentiful supply of able-bodied labour are found amongst the owners (or tenants) of small farms on which an independent household is linked with independent farming” (Kautsky, 1966:159-60 cited in Alavi, 1987: 192)

<sup>140</sup> “Migrant labour...has the same effect as the relocation of large-scale industry into the open countryside. It bolsters small landownership, this supposedly conservative element, but at the same time thoroughly transforms the conditions under which the small landowners live, filling them with needs and perspectives which are anything but conservative” (Kautsky, 1899/1988: 196).

Part of the small peasant family, naturally those most fit for work, periodically migrates, or emigrates, both to feed themselves and beyond that to earn money for the entire family (ibid: 193). In fact, it [circular migration] provides the means by which the imminently bankrupt dwarf-holders can maintain their property. In addition, it provides the numerous propertyless members of the rural population with the means to purchase their own small farm, be this on their own or on rented land (ibid: 191).

In other words, as noted earlier in Chapter-4, “[t]he role of labour is both contradictory and mutually reinforcing. On one hand migrant labour contributes to low-cost non-agricultural production while, on the other hand, remittances to rural households return resources to the agricultural economy and subsidize its reproduction” (Harriss-White, 2008:556; also noted in Chapter-4), in the context of semi-arid regions in India, observes that the “[r]emittances from migration – reverse flows of resources – will increasingly help to sustain rural households’ consumption, smooth incomes, repay debt and cover agricultural inputs” (ibid: 558).

Migration of labour in the study area is accompanied in the context of persistence and increase of small-farms. Work away from the home village not only provides for household survival but also sustains agriculture in smallholdings, which often needs to be supplemented with non-farm incomes for its reproduction. Thus these households, which combine farming in the home village with wage labour in the non-farm/urban centers, are neither ‘peasants’ nor ‘wage labour’ but are ‘classes of labour’.

From the point of view of agriculture and village socioeconomic structure, the emergent character of village households has its roots in the political economy of agrarian change, demographic expansion and the nature of available employment in the urban non-farm sector. Persistence of smallholding agriculture without expropriation of ‘peasants’ from land, despite commercialization and intensification of agriculture (as observed elsewhere in India by Harriss, 1982), and further increase in their number largely due to sheer demographic growth pushed the land-poor (small and marginal holding) households in search of alternative sources of livelihood to supplement incomes from agricultural wage labour and small farms. On the other hand, the precarious nature of employment/livelihood options in the non-farm

sector/urban areas ensured a continuous relationship of the labouring households with land and the village, also revitalizing farms and permanently returning to the village post retirement.

The predominant pattern of labour migration that emerged over a period of time in the village, and one can safely characterise the same for the district as well, is in which the household is stretched spatially with dual residence –a permanent residence in the village and a hired *jhopad*/shack in the city. It is a household, a socioeconomic unit, but with two residences and two hearths with some members raising children and managing cultivation in the village and others, in their prime, labouring in the city. Those in their prime and labouring in the city return to the village occasionally or seasonally during the year, but return permanently when they are older and become physically weak for the work available to them in the cities. The work that is accessible is manual and requires physical strength and is daily-wage-based work that is almost always temporary.

Spatial mobility of labour away from the village, which started off initially during scare years and then seasonally during lean labour periods, has assumed near-permanence with long durations of the year of one's prime spent labouring away from the village. Initially this phenomenon was restricted to the land-poor households, agricultural labourers, and the 'backward' caste groups. It gradually spread to the 'self-employed' cultivators as well, and to those households whose previous generations were dependent on cultivation with hired labour. It represents a reverse 'mimesis' in economic life by the so-called 'forward' caste households, who began adopting the everyday-work lives of the 'backward' castes. This spatial mobility that represents transiency in working lives is now a persistent feature. It may be called intransient-transient labour. In other words, this migrant labour is 'footloose' without permanent displacement or outmigration of the rural households to urban centers (Breman, 1996; 2010).

Such intransient-transiency of labouring lives makes the spatio-cultural distinction of 'urban' and 'rural' labourless important (, or even redundant), but the corresponding spatio-economic differences are significant. These differences facilitate the persistence of this circular migration of labouring

households. As Shrestha emphasises, labour migration is a “manifestation of...the social and spatial arrangements of economy” (Shrestha, 1988:185-89).

Such spatio-economic distinction facilitates and sustains transiency of labour by separating to a significant extent the places of employment and reproduction of labour. In other words, there are two fundamental aspects which define spatial differentials that sustain continuous spatial mobility of labour: one, the spatial difference in or the different levels of economic/employment opportunities and, two, the spatial differences in the living standards and, thereby, the cost of reproduction.

Reviewing vast anthropological literature on various aspects of labour and labour markets in *Laboring in the Factories and in the Fields*, Sutti Ortiz points to the studies that emphasize and incorporate the “spatial framework”, “the relationships between the sites where work is performed and where labour is reproduced” (Ortiz, 2002: 397). On similar lines as that of Kautsky, Michael Burawoy (1976), Ortiz elaborated on the ‘geographical separation’ of the employing economy and an ‘alternate’ economy/home that not only reproduces the system of migrant labour, but this system enables the employing economy to “externalize” part of the reproduction costs of labour to “an alternate economy and/or state”<sup>141</sup>.

While acknowledging the “importance” of perspectives that focus on “individual migrant” as a “rational actor maximizing interests under market conditions”, Burawoy points out their inadequacy in explaining “the functioning of a *system* of migrant labor” in the broader political and economic context (ibid: 1050-51). He explains, “[f]or an economy to function, a labor force has to be maintained and renewed. In other words, workers have to subsist from day to day and vacancies created by their departure from or by the expansion of the labor force must be filled by new recruits” (ibid:1051). The “oscillatory movement” or circulation of labour between the employing economy and the home is characterised by the

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<sup>141</sup>Burawoy, drawing from Marx, Balibar and Gramsci, notes that the concept of “reproduction” is “central” to his argument. He explains that “[s]ocial relations, labor power, systems of migrant labor, etc., do not merely exist but have to be produced again and again—that is, *reproduced*. Analysis of conditions of reproduction entails examining how different levels or regions of the social structure interconnect so as to ensure the repetition of the particular process of “producing” labor power, systems of migrant labor, etc.” (Burawoy, 1976: 1051-52, footnote 2). He, further, adds that “the conditions of reproduction” may “vary” or “have to be modified” in order for a set of “characteristics” of what is “reproduced” are to be “invariant” (ibid). In case of migrant labour, he notes, “while the definition of a system migrant labor entails the specification of a set of invariant features, the conditions of reproduction will vary between societies and over time” (ibid).

separation of “maintenance” and “renewal”, the two elements that constitute reproduction of labour (ibid). In case of migrant labour, “the two processes take place in geographically separate locations” (ibid: 1052). While production and reproduction are linked by “economic necessity”<sup>142</sup>, the costs of renewal which are “normally borne” by the employing economy are “externalized” to another economy in case of migrant labour (ibid:1053).

Thus, “the significance of migrant labour lies in the separation of the processes of maintenance and renewal, so that renewal takes place where living standards are low and maintenance takes place within easy access of employment” (ibid:1082). He, further, contends that an “urban ghetto” is a “functional equivalent” of a migrant’s home village, as the “renewal costs are low” at both of these locations (ibid:1083-84). Thus, Burawoy’s analysis of the conditions of “reproduction” of migrant labour is not only applicable to migrants circulating between countries, but also within a country in which spatial differences in reproduction costs exist. Not only because the living standards are low in the home village, but a certain access to livelihood options and resources enables the household to maximize economic viability at ‘home’ from migrant remittances. Migrant remittances, meagre as they may be, become a possibility also because of lowering living standards and food consumption costs at the place of employment—living in slums or shelters at the work site itself, and partly consuming food grains carried from home village, either produced on one’s own farm or subsidised by the state.

The “temporary migrations” when the ‘peasant’ appeared to remain a ‘peasant’ during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the West (Kautsky, 1889/1989:193) decreased and migrants settled down in urban centres to become “urban citizens” and “often as industrial workers” (Breman, 2010:3). Whereas, the economic expansion towards the end of colonial rule in India and more so after Independence generated migrant workers that were “unsettled settlers” in urban centres within the country (de Haan,

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<sup>142</sup> “A system of migrant labour contains elements of each. On the one hand, renewal processes are dependent on income left over from maintenance, which is remitted home by the productive worker. On the other hand, productive workers require continued support from their families engaged in renewal at home, because they have no permanent legal or political status at the place of work. In other words, the state organizes the dependence of the productive worker on the reproductive worker, while the economy organizes the dependency of the reproductive worker on the productive worker. The interdependence establishes the cohesion of the family” (ibid:1052-53).

1997). There was, of course, also ‘permanent’ migration of families that settled down in the towns and cities parting with land in home villages, as Srinivas(1959) described in the case of Brahmins in his analysis of ‘dominant caste’.<sup>143</sup>

There was also migration of families with substantial landholdings, seizing the lucrative economic and employment opportunities in the cities, but doing so without parting with land in the village as exemplified in what Balagopal (1987:1545) called a “typical family” of “the provincial propertied class” in post-Independent India.<sup>144</sup> This study is concerned with the classes of labour that do not find a permanent foothold in the cities, not because of their preference for ‘village’ life but a manifestation of their socioeconomic position. For example, de Haan “still” finds, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in an industrial area of Calcutta, the “features described in the reports” at the beginning of the century about migrant workers (ibid:919). ‘Unsettled settlers’, he describes, “are migrants who came to the industrial areas, but have continued to maintain their rural connections, going back regularly during their working life and after retirement” (ibid). He observes that “instability has been a central feature of [this] labour force” (deHaan, 1993:186).

Economic expansion had been marked by ‘informalisation’ of work (Breman, 1996; 2010) leading to a phenomenon that Mike Davis (2006) observed and often quoted in recent years, called ‘urbanization without industrialization’. A large number of workers that migrate to urban centres from the countryside in various parts of Asia, including India, Breman (2010:3) notes, “do not ‘arrive’ in the cities”. “Informality” of work and “circulation”, rather than “permanent outmigration”, characterise the nature of this work force:

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<sup>143</sup>Srinivas (1959: 2) notes, “[t]he Brahmins were the first to sense the new economic opportunities opened to them through Western education, and they gradually moved to the towns to enter the new white-collar professions. Urban living, the cost of educating children, and the high dowries which the new education and economic opportunities had brought about, gradually caused the Brahmins to part with their land. Much of this land passed to non-Brahmins, especially the Peasants, during the years 1900-1948.”

<sup>144</sup> In his critique of new ‘peasant movements’ (called as ‘new farmers movements’ by other scholars) in India during the 1980s, Balagopal(1987:1545) notes, “[a] typical family of this provincial propertied class has a landholding in its native village, cultivated by hired labour, bataidars, tenants or farm-servants and supervised by the father or one son; business of various descriptions in towns—trade, finance, hotels, cinemas and contracts—managed by other sons; and perhaps a young and bright child who is a doctor or engineer or maybe even a professor at one of the small town universities that have sprouted all over the country during the last two decades”.

...although the pace of urbanization has accelerated, it is generally not accompanied by a rapid expansion in industrial employment. Migrants who settle down in the urban fringes fail, to a large extent, to become absorbed in steady jobs in factories, mills or even small-scale sweatshops. Instead, they find a niche in the service sector as waged workers or remain self-employed. They get stuck in the informal sector economy, the defining features of which are low wages, payment by piece rate or job work, un-orlow-skilled work, casual and intermittent employment, erratic working hours, no written labour contracts, and an absence of institutional representation. These features dominate in the slum habitats where most of the newcomers from the hinterland congregate. ...The attempts made by a huge reserve army of labour to get urbanized are being frustrated by the growing saturation of employment niches... Thus, migrant labour has remained footloose, a phenomenon which has led to the continual circulation rather than to the permanent outmigration of workers from the countryside (ibid: 2-3).

With this understanding, the rest of this chapter will look at how the pattern of migration from the study village, emerged over a period of time, its scale, the nature of recruitment and work, and its role in the household economy. It further focuses on the qualitative aspects of the process of spatial mobility and work away from the village, and the meanings that this phenomenon has come to acquire over a period of time and its implications on social relations in the village.

### **7.1 Labour migration and forms of labour recruitment**

Labourers from Chennaram started labouring in work sites far away from the village by the 1950s according to the elderly villagers. This mobility was prompted more by the 'labour contractors' than the labourers' own initiative to find work elsewhere notwithstanding scarcity of work and livelihood options within the village. Going by the population growth of about 150% in the district from 1951 to 2011, the village might have had about a hundred households compared to 230 during the field study. Yet, with no technological improvements in agriculture by then, land-poor households lived in scarcity during summers and drought years. The supplementary availability of work elsewhere during these lean periods found men and women willing to travel long distances for work.

Households with substantial landholdings did not curtail such mobility of labourers, which, at the time, was not against their interests. Basi Reddy from Chennaram explained that this was because landowners could still find sufficient

labourers to work in their fields, and such mobility was restricted to lean periods of labour demand and not during monsoon season when agricultural labourers were required in the village. Secondly, it was not 'outsiders' who encouraged labour to work away from the village, but the locally powerful landowning *reddys* well known in neighbouring villages. The *reddys* in their own villages along with influential *reddys* from other villages facilitated the mobility of labourers through oral or informal written contracts. Usually wages were advanced for a stipulated duration to engage in manual labour in construction work. Most of such work was initially for canal works involving digging and carrying head load. This kind of work came to be known as *mantipani* (mud work).

Labourers mobilised by a 'labour contractor' extending advances refer this form of recruitment and spatial mobility as *mantipani* or *gumpupani* (work and migration in groups). Mainly to distinguish it from the current form of labour mobility, where the individuals involved move *sonthaga* (independently) to urban centres. It is said that 'labour contractors' hailing from neighbouring villages came to recruit labourers from Chennaram for *mantipani*. Initially they approached prominent landowning *reddys* to help them in recruiting labour and also to ensure that the labourers vowed to fulfil the terms and conditions of work to honour the advance payment.

Ananthappa who went four times for *mantipani* along with others about 40 years ago says Ananth Reddy from this village was involved in the deals between the labour contractors and the labourers. He was not aware if Ananth Reddy received any commission for his role. Ashi Reddy from Chennaram, in his 70s now, was educated in the 1950s and was involved in drafting written contracts for contractors when the labourers accepted advance money. He was also employed by a contractor to supervise work and monitor labourers. Such written contracts, he says, had no legal value. But this was done to invoke a sense of a pact so that the labourers find themselves in a binding agreement once they leave their thumb impression on a written paper, he says. This was to ensure that the labourers did not run away from the work sites before completing the term of agreement.

Advancing wage to workers system of labour recruitment had evolved on the lines of attached labour. But unlike the yearly-attached labour system it did not employ labourers all through the year, but for a maximum of nine months when there

was construction work. The contract ended just before the rainy season. It involved an advance payment along with cooked food and shelter at the work site itself. The work was manual from dawn to dusk. This migrant work in construction of dams, canals, and other such public works, was considered very arduous compared to agricultural work. But it was undertaken as it provided a higher advance wage and regular employment compared to agricultural wage in the village. Unlike in the attached labour system in the village, which employed only male members, the labour contractors also recruited couples paying both in advance and thus providing regular employment to the female members too. This employing of females was unlike agricultural work in the village. As this migration for *mantipani* usually commenced after the monsoon seasons, they could also cultivate their own fields besides engaging in agricultural wage work in the village.

The defining feature of this form of migration and labour recruitment was the advancing of wages and the active role of the 'labour contractor', who facilitated labour recruitment and migration from the home village to the work site. The contractor was a catalyst in both mobility and immobility of labourers. Advance payment ensured spatial mobility of labourers from the village, but made them immobile at the work site, where they had to fulfil the requirements of the contractor. Such a system not only ensured a continuous supply and a guaranteed number of labourers, but also allowed the contractor to extract work at lower wages.

Krishnaiah's study (1997) of 'contract migration system' during the early 1990s in Mahbubnagar district points out that the migrant labour from his study village employed through this system to construct the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat received wages that were much lower than the Gujarati casual labourers at the site.<sup>145</sup> Further, the duration of work per day of these migrant labourers was 12 hours, while the Gujarati local 'casual' labourers worked 8 hours, including an hour-long lunch break in both cases (ibid: 132).

This contracting of migrant labour from Mahbubnagar district is believed to have started in the 1930s, when dam constructions began in Hyderabad state (Olsen

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<sup>145</sup> His calculation, considering the interest rate for the advance payment and the expenses towards food as part of wage for the migrant workers, reveals that "the wage rate, net of expenses, of the local male and female labourers are Rs. 25 and Rs. 15 respectively, whereas the male and female migrant labourers get the wage which is only Rs. 10" (Krishnaiah, 1997: 132).

and Murthi, 2000; Vaikuntam, 2004). Documentary evidence shows, for example, that in the construction of the Nizamsagar dam since 1934, labourers were recruited from Mahabubnagar and other districts within the Nizam dominions by paying yearly advances.<sup>146</sup>

Given the recurrent drought conditions in the district, which persisted, labourers from this district were mobilised by 'labour contractors' to work in major irrigation and power projects even in post-independent India. Reddy, D.N (2003:140) remarks, "[i]t may not be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly any major irrigation project in India which did not attract labour from Palamur".<sup>147</sup> It is in this context that this system of migration, called 'contract migrant labour', emerged as a pattern in Mahabubnagar. Krishnaiah (1997), Olsen and Murthi (2000), Reddy, D.N, (2003), Pitcherit (2006) and others discussed how this system operates. All these studies describe the involvement of a middle man, between the labourers and the big contractors, known as 'labour contractors' or 'commission agents', or 'gumpumestrilu', all of whom facilitated the migration of labourers to work sites by paying advances (partly or fully incurring the costs). These labour contractors would facilitate labour migration to work sites within or outside the state and also would supervise and monitor the labourers while they worked.

Such contract migrant labour systems prevailed in other parts of India also since colonial times. After the abolition of 'slave' trade in India by the British in 1843 (an "indirect and gradual method" through the Ordinance by the Calcutta government compared to 'the Slavery Abolition Act passed by the British parliament in 1833' for the British Empire), the "modern liberal notions of property, equity and contract embodied in British colonial law" gave legitimacy to the 'transaction/contract' between the 'master/creditor' and labourer who 'mortgaged his/her labour' against the

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<sup>146</sup> Olsen and Murthi, 2000; They cite the *Report on the History of Nizamsagar Project*, Hyderabad, Deccan (H.E.H. Nizam Dominion, 1939): "The construction of Nizamsagar dam involved a massive need for labour both skilled and unskilled. . . especially excavation of earth, blasting rock in foundation, quarrying stone for machinery and miscellaneous. The labour for these works had been imported from dominions including Raichur, Gulbarga, Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda and Karimnagar. . . Palmuuries coming from Mahabubnagar did a good work at excavation, especially earth work at ground level. . . The method of recruiting the labourers is mainly through the department by forwarding advances ranging from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per year for the gangs willing to come" (ibid; <http://www.yorku.ca/jspot/2/wkolsenrvramana.htm> ).

<sup>147</sup> He notes the state of "Andhra Pradesh supplies a large class of contractors from Nellore district and wherever they went, they went up to Bhakra, the Palmur labour followed them" (ibid).

credit through *The Workman's Breach of Contract Act* of 1959 (Pouchepadass, 2009: 26-30). This law conferred the 'right' to the creditor and to approach courts in case of 'breach' of contract by the debtor (ibid:30)<sup>148</sup>.

The 'migrant labour policy', which started in the 1830s to recruit labourers ('indentured' labour) from India to the colonies, in the context of shortage of cheap labour after abolition of slavery, "turned into an inland migrant labour policy" by late 19<sup>th</sup> century to cater to tea plantations, jute mills and coal mines in East India (Gupta, 1981: 1783-97).

But the employers, mostly Europeans, realised that recruitment through 'licensed contractors' as stipulated under *The Workman's Breach of Contract Act* was "too expensive, uneconomic and inconvenient" (ibid: 1785). Therefore, new modes of informal recruitment were encouraged through 'jobbers', the intermediaries locally known as *sardars* (*sardari* system), who played an active role in extending advances and "engaging, supervising and controlling labour" at the migrant destinations (ibid; also see Sen, 2002 on the role of middlemen and advances in mills, plantations and mines and Kerr, 1998, in railway construction in colonial India).<sup>149</sup>

Post-Independence, in response to the early 1960s studies of the Planning Commission that pointed at the rapid increase of informal contract labour "in all segments of industry", *The Contract Labour Regulation and Abolition Act, 1970* came into existence (Budhe, 1993). Under this law, only the licensed contractors meeting the stipulated conditions of pay and work are allowed to contract labourers and are required to renew their contracts every year. The law, however, did not have any impact. Budhe remarks, "[t]he act neither regulates employment of contract labour nor abolishes it. It only facilitates employment of contract labour through

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<sup>148</sup> However, despite the formal abolition of slavery, Pouchepadass notes, "servitude had not disappeared; it had only become formally monetized", and with the legal recognition of 'debt transfer', "the sale and mortgage of dependant labourers" continued till about the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century in eastern India (ibid).

<sup>149</sup> Gupta notes, "The Workmen's Breach of Contract Act, 1859 and several subsequent legislations enabled the planters to overcome ... problems and to bind labourers. ... Recruitment was made by a class of licensed contractors, many of whom were Europeans, with headquarters in Calcutta. Under every contractor hundreds of professional recruiters (*arkattis*) who were mostly villagers - men and women on the spot - worked" (ibid: 1785). In the course of time, Gupta observes, the tea planters realized that "recruitment through licensed contractors were too expensive, uneconomic and inconvenient". "Hence, ... various other systems were tried and came into operation. Of these, the *sardari* system which eventually came to be known as 'free' recruitment was introduced in 1870 and with passage of time evolved as a major - and after 1926 as the sole - method of recruitment" (ibid).

registration/licences and merely lays down nebulous service conditions, under the guise of regulating employment” (ibid: 24). Given the provisions of meagre punishment for violating the rules and the prosecution through the government agents, he concludes, “both the principal employer and the contractor should find it beneficial not to comply with the provisions of law...”(ibid). Similar is the fate of the *Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979* which applies largely to the same set of employers as in the case of contract labour because the latter are mostly migrant labourers (Noorani, 1982; Randeria and Yagnik, 1983).

Oslen and Murthy (2000) considered this contract migration system prevalent in Mahbubnagar district as ‘bonded’ labour that “violates the legal rights of workers”. Krishnaiah (1997:126) contests this notion of ‘bondage’ and argues that no “coercion is involved in the recruitment and continuance of labourers in the contract system” and that “a labourer is free to enter or leave the system”. Pitcherit (2006), however, argues that although the labourer “can change” the employer, and “in fact” it is “rare” that the labourer works for the “same *mestri* for several years”, he “cannot get out of the system as long as the debt has not been settled”. Both Krishanah’s and Pitcherit’s studies show that the labourers are free to leave the employer at the end of agreed contract term or after repaying the (remaining) debt, if any.

Guerin (2009) in case of migrant workers and Guerin et al (2009) in case of migrant sugarcane cutters, both studies in Tamil Nadu, argue that these workers do not consider themselves ‘bonded’. But the latter argue that “a system of advances” does not necessarily entail ‘unfree’ labour and nor does “the freedom to change employers” imply ‘free’ relations (Guerin et al, 2009:237). “[I]t is rather the consequences of the advance on the wages and on the bargaining power of the labourers in terms of wages which should be considered indicators of a free/unfree relationship” (ibid). Thus, even though the labourers could “prevent the abusive relationship of domination and patronage” by changing their employers, Guerin *et al* argue that “the simple fact that the migration and advance principle that is attached to it implies huge reductions of wage is enough to claim that it is indeed bondage” (ibid:238). Such a notion of ‘bondage’, or what they call ‘neo-bondage’ (the term used by Breman, 1996), (re)interprets the conception of ‘bondage’ and ‘unfree’ labour largely in economic

terms, while it was 'extra-economic coercion' that was considered to be the defining character of such relations, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

This is, however, also not a case of only economic coercion/compulsion as in the case of labourers who are 'free' to sell their labour to the highest bidder, the wages in which case still could be low given the market conditions. Brass (1999: 11-12) explains such form as bondage/unfree labour conceptually although it "lacks coercive appearance of bonded labour" given that the labourer "requests" or "voluntarily" accepts the debt. "In ideological terms", Brass observes, "a bonded labour works to pay off a debt rather than for a wage", which results in "economic decommodification of labour-power" (ibid). Thus, as the capacity to "commodify" his/her "labour power" is "constrained...because of the debts owed to his/her employer, the worker in question cannot be considered free" (ibid: 11).

Guerin *et al*'s assertion of 'bondage' should, therefore, apply to all situations where the labourers in consideration for an 'advance' or 'debt' receive wages that are lower than those paid to 'local' workers. In other words, such a characterization of 'bondage' is nothing but one which conforms to one of the conditions that defines 'bonded labour' according to the *The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976*—in which the 'debtor' renders service to the 'creditor' "in consideration of an advance" for wages that are less than the "minimum wages fixed by the Government" or those paid "to the labourers in the same locality" (Govt. of India, 1976).

Migrant workers from Mahbubnagar employed through advances, even though they were free to change employers, received lower wages than the local labourers, as Krishnaiah (1997) and Olsen and Murthi (2000) show. Thus they constitute 'bonded labour' in legal terms and this system is a violation of legal provisions that are meant to safeguard workers rights. Such recognition of the conditions of labourers in legal and economic terms is significant from the point of view of standards of life and work prescribed by the State and its responsibility in promoting and safeguarding such standards. However, such simple characterisation does not fully appreciate the predicament of those who live through such conditions. It is important to take into account the meanings of spatial mobility, despite such conditions, for the workers

who do not consider themselves as 'bonded', and the context of lower wages and unavailability of work in the home villages.

Accepting an advance wage and migrating to work with a labour contractor at far off distances was a way out from the scarce livelihood opportunities in the home village. The advance extended was higher than the advance (yearly wage) in attached labour in agriculture. Further, as mentioned above, this system offered an advance to women too. Women who worked on a daily-wage basis in the village, the form which is relatively considered as 'free' labour, also accepted advance and joined in migrant work. This was because it not only provided (regular) work elsewhere when there was no (regular) work available in the village, it provided an advance, a substantial amount at one time for their (mortgaged) labour, which was unimaginable for them to earn from their daily wages working in the village. Such an amount as an advance also created a sense of empowerment for women workers *vis-à-vis* men.

It was only men who could obtain substantial amounts in advance through attached labour in the village. For men, this system of migration created an opportunity to break away from the continued attachment in view of their indebtedness to the employers in the village. Entering into 'bondage' along with their wives for six to nine months with the labour contractor they could break away from attached labour in the village that would have, otherwise, required them to continue to serve for years. Thus, entering into bondage and migration with labour contractors provided an advance and regular work for women and a higher advance and respite from long-term bondage in the village for men. In other words, arduous conditions of work and 'bondage' elsewhere had liberating effects and meanings for the labouring households in the village.

Changes occurred in the migration system that involved advances, and the present trend (discussed below) of independent mobility of workers, which involved no advance and no labour contractor at the source village, emerged as the predominant form. Initially it was influential persons, mostly well-connected landowning *reddys*, mobilised labourers from their neighbouring villages for the contractors. They mobilised large number of labourers, supervised them at work sites and for this they received commission per labourer from the contractor. The advances extended to the labourers were borne by the contractor or a sub-contractor. As the

number of such influential men willing to mobilise labourers increased, contractors and sub-contractors put part of the burden towards advances on these middlemen whose identity became 'labour contractors'. Having invested money the labour contractors sought to extract maximum labour to earn a profit beyond the interest on their investment. Like in the case of attached labour in the village, labourers started breaching contracts with the labour contractors and running away from work sites. Three such instances were reported by Chennai labourers.

Once the labourers at distant work site experienced unbearable living conditions as they suffered from malaria and other diseases; they collectively fled the work site without the knowledge of the labour contractor. In another such case the labour contractor's men caught hold of a couple from this village while others managed to escape. They forced the woman to hand over her little gold and silver jewellery before letting the couple free. One S. Reddy from this village, who invested around fifty thousand rupees and mobilised labourers for a contractor faced similar a situation and lost most of his investment. After such an experience in his first attempt he did not venture in this field again.

'Labour contractors' started finding this field less 'prestigious' as men from 'backward' castes also started mobilising labourers, although in fewer numbers, by extending advances. With increasing numbers of such middlemen they were attributed a less prestigious identity of '*gumpumestri*'. Narasanna, mentioned in the case study of Hanmanthu, who is himself from an OBC caste group, was a second-generation 'labour contractor'. He mobilised labourers to Nasik in the 1980s through advances but later settled down in the city. He mentions that he was once a "labour contractor" to distinguish himself from the '*gumpumestris*'. During this field work he still contracted construction work but hired daily wage labourers. He says his field of work was no more respectable and profitable and he would not let his sons continue in the same professions. He says "the labourers are not the same anymore".

Olsen and Murthi (2000) also note that such labour contractors "in the past mostly came from the upper castes, particularly Reddies" and by the 1990s, sub-contractors encouraged "*mestris* from all castes". Even the *lambadis* (ST) with their long experience of migrant work emerged as *gumpu mestris* in the region. The emergence of '*gumpumestris*' from 'lower' castes had been in tandem with the social

mobility of 'backward castes' in this region, particularly the traditional toddy tappers and shepherds (see Vaddiraju, 1999 and Picherit, 2009; they trace the 'emergence'/'social mobility' of 'backward' castes in this region).

In a context of high investment on the part of *gumpumestris*, competition between such mestris for labourers and risk of labourers running away they had to be very vigilant of the labourers and extract enough work to yield any profit. This, however, had to be balanced with an element of patronage and benign treatment towards the labourers in order to retain them. Picherit (2009:267-70) captures this middleman's position in a nuanced way: "...their will to reduce the cost of production included in the bondage relationships make the economic aspects increasingly predominant. But by doing so, they lose control on the labourers. The mestris tend to behave as brokers and not as patrons, but expect to keep the prestige of being a patron. ...The authority and social mobility of the mistry are limited by his position as a middleman....he cannot leave one of the two sides...he cannot be too far from workers".

The profits for construction firms and contractors, thus, thrive on the cheap labour mobilised and controlled by these resourceful middlemen. The latter played a crucial role in the link, "the last link in the chain of intermediaries" involved in subcontracting, between work and labourers for whom the advance matters the most (ibid:266-67).

This sketchy description of the system of migration involving advances is based on the experiences of the labourers of Chennaram who migrated for advances in the past, through my interactions during my visits to various parts of the district before settling down in Chennaram and partly drawing from the studies of this system in this district. During the months of April and May, 2006 I randomly visited certain villages and mandal headquarters in the central and northern parts of the district in order to understand, cursorily, the incidence and patterns of migration before selecting a village for the study. This is the time MGNREGA was implemented in the district.

The district administration, while promoting the Act, also started more intense campaigns against 'contract migrant labour' as 'illegal bonded labour' and called for providing information of '*gumpumestris*' to charge them under existing laws. There

was pressure from above to show the success of this Act and meet the targets stipulated in its implementation as this Act was the flagship scheme of the government (UPA) that was formed at the centre in 2004. The administration took up campaigns encouraging labourers to breach contracts or to approach the police or to give tip-offs about the departure information of groups. The group departures had been a secret affair even before because of the campaigns of its illegality.

The media and the NGOs were active in exposing the harassment faced by those who ran away from *gumpumestris*. In one such instance, Prabhakar Reddy, a daily wage labourer hailing from the same district, along with whom I stayed in Tirupathi Reddy's rented *jhopad* in a slum in Ulhasnagar (in Thane district adjoining Mumbai) in July 2007, informed me that his cousin, who was a *gumpumestri* was arrested earlier that year by the police. This was because he along with others in his village tried to confine labourers from another village who ran away from his work site before finishing the agreed term. They confined and warned the labourers to leave only after repaying the advance. With a tip-off, the police intervened and arrested him. He had settled the matter with the police without having to face criminal proceedings.

An informal conversation with a co-passenger in a bus in Peddamandimandal (central part of the district) revealed that he claimed to have lost Rs.1,20,000 of borrowed money in the same year (2006), which he had invested on a group of labourers. Such an atmosphere, where the media and police would come to the rescue, encouraged labourers to breach contracts, while *mestris* had become wary of extending advances in this district. It was said that many *gumpumestris* had started employing labour from the districts of Western Odisha extending advances lower than those in Mahbubnagar.

However, during the year 2006 the hiring of local labour still continued as a predominant form in central parts of the district, although on a decline. Independent movement of labourers was slowly picking up. This system based on advances and labour contractors had given way to independent movement of labourers in the north-western part of the district by the 1990s (also see Reddy, B, 2006; 2012). Chennaram is located in this part of the district. The reason for selecting a village for the study in

this part was to understand this form of migration in detail which seemed to have been evolving in other parts of the district too.

From the 1970s and more so in the 1980s labour contractors had also mobilised workers to work in cities like Mumbai in construction of housing and commercial complexes. Labourers were sheltered within the under-construction structures or near the construction sites like in case of dams and canals. This is when they started getting familiar with the work options and labour markets in the cities.

While some moved to new construction sites wherever the labour contractors took them, some stayed back in the temporary settlements that they had occupied and inhabited near the previous construction sites. Such settlements cropped up either on the outskirts of growing cities or near the sewage canals or existing slums. For example, the slum in Nasik at which the labourers from Chennaram and other neighbouring villages lived was initially a temporary settlement in the city's outskirts on the banks of a small stream that joined the river Godavari. This stream became a sewage drain and the city expanded on this side till the banks of the Godavari. Some old inhabitants of this settlement continued to stay and got their shacks officially registered with the help of local politicians, and some middlemen also occupied this space, raised shacks and started renting out or sold them to the labourers. Narsanna (hailing from the study region), who was a labour contractor occupied more than one shack initially and later on constructed a better house for himself and sold off the remaining shacks to others. This is how Chennappa (case study-2) bought his *jhopad* in which he was a tenant.

Similar is the story of a few SCs from Chennaram who settled down at Kamarajnagar (near Ghatkopar east) in Mumbai from the 1970s. The area was said to be inundated with sewage, upon which this slum emerged. About five households (all SCs) from this village own small dwellings at this place. Members of a couple of households who stayed here since the 1970s found jobs in the Bombay Municipal Corporation as sewage cleaners (both men). Another male member was employed as a peon in the telecom department. A few of those who continued to stay back in the city slums from the 1970s also found work outside construction. Some had worked in a factory that manufactured copper filament, which was later shut down in the 1980s. But a majority continued to engage in construction work.

Recruitment in construction work took two forms in the cities after the labour contractors brought workers to construction sites. What I present here is not applicable in general to the whole of the construction industry in cities, but is limited to migrant labourers from Chennaram working in sites in Mumbai and Nasik. It occurs currently in small and medium range construction, mostly of private housing and commercial buildings. The advance in the 'contract labour migration' system, in principle, was a fixed amount for a stipulated prospective period of time for an individual or a couple. This system gradually changed to construction work in the cities with varying amounts of advances (that were less than what prevailed for longer durations in the former system). These advances were required to be repaid by work calculated in terms of daily wage. The advance amount was deducted based on the number of days the labourers worked for the wage rates fixed for men and women in their respective nature of work. But the fixed wage in this form of recruitment was lower than what is paid to daily wage labourers for the same work taking into consideration the provision of shelter at the construction site and the advance.

In 'contract migrant' system the labourers were/are provided cooked food, because of which the need for consumption loans was reduced during the contract period, even if the whole advance amount is used to repay debt or for other commitments. Whereas in the case of construction sites in cities, a part of the advance has to be spent on daily consumption needs and additional consumption loans are taken from the labour contractor as no food is provided. Thus the labourer was required to continue to serve as many wage-days as may be required until the advance is paid off. The labourer bore the burden of no-work days at the site, which could occur for a variety of reasons. This meant that labourers had to work additional days to clear off his/her debt. While in the *contract migrant system* the labour contractor would make a loss if work was off for any reason as the duration of the contract with labourers is fixed, and the contractor would therefore, seek to extract maximum number of work-days within this time.

Residing and working at the construction sites in the cities allowed some flexibility for seasonal migrants without having to commit to the labour contractors for long/specified durations. The cheap-shelter possibility in the makeshift huts made of tarpaulin sheets at the worksite meant no long-term planning for the labourers. If

they did not seek any advance, a couple could work for a couple of months or till the construction of a building is over and return to the village according to their convenience. Thus labour contractors found the required number of labourers willing to work, seeking little or no advance.

The 'provision' of space for living at the construction site or within the under-construction buildings became the basis for this form of recruitment, which involved working exclusively for a labour contractor at lower wages. There was no compulsion of providing advance and there was no extra cost borne by the employer for shelter for the labourers but the lower wage in this form was justified by labour contractors invoking a comparison with the cost of house rent in case of independent daily wage labourers.

Sayappa and Eswaramma (case study-3), as depicted in Chapter-5, lived and worked at a construction site in Hyderabad. They received lower wages for the same work compared to daily wage labourers who resided independently in rented dwellings. However, they found this arrangement convenient because they had no long-term plans of working away from the village. Given their age, they did not consider renting a dwelling like younger couples who rent and search for work on a daily basis. The youth from *sakali* and *madiga* castes from this village who stayed and worked at this site informed Sayappa about the availability of work and took the couple there. These youth moved to other places within Hyderabad renting dwellings but Sayappa and his wife stayed and worked at the same site. Even though the labour contractor offered to provide credit if this couple needed any, but they refused to take any in order to be free to return home whenever they wanted.

In other words, the provision of living space, congested and precarious as it is, at the construction site plays a similar role as that of an advance in the *contract migrant system* in terms of lower wages but without the obligation of working for a specified period. Because of the convenience of joining and leaving this arrangement at will with no burden of advance, lower living costs, and effort in finding a place of work, some households preferred this form of recruitment. However, this is convenient only to those workers who have no specialised skills and are at the lowest end of the work hierarchy in construction; for example those who carry head loads find more or less regular work at a particular worksite. Very few like Sayappa and

Eswaramma from Chennaram work in this kind of arrangement, where they live at the worksite and work for one labour contractor.

The majority from Chennaram work as daily wage labourers residing independently in rented dwellings in slums. The recruitment of such labourers is, in principle, on a daily wage basis, but most of them work usually for a week or more with the same employer. Although recruited as daily wage labour in construction, the wages are usually paid at the end of a week unless labourers are required only for a day or two or the labourer joins only for a day or two.

Thus a *hafta* (Hindi word for a week) has emerged as a standard minimum duration of employment at the end of which the payment is made for six or seven days depending on whether there was a day off. This way the employers do not have to search for labourers every day and the labourers also find it convenient if they find the negotiated wage and work acceptable to them.

On the first day of the week, which may vary in different regions (Wednesday is end of the week in Nasik, while it is Sunday in other regions), labourers gather in large numbers at the *naaka* or *adda*, a labour-market point, which is usually a crossroad (junction) in their locality, to be recruited for work. Not all of them who gather at the labour point are without assured work. Some may have ended the deal with the previous week's employer. Some may have assured the employer to continue, but yet are open to change the employer if they find a better deal in terms of wage or if they are unsatisfied with the work or the employer.

At times, mere separation from their close social group or distance to the worksite may be reason enough to change the employer. Although most of the labour transactions occur on the first day of the week, not everyone finds employment for the whole week. It also differs based on the nature of work specialisation, which is discussed in the next section. But not only those who are in search of employers, but others who are already employed for the week, also gather at the labour point on most days before leaving for work. Men also gather here in the evenings after returning from their work while women return to their homes to cook food. These spaces provide for labour transactions and also to exchange information on work and wage that help in deciding whether to continue or change their employers. The roadside or

tea stalls near the labour point are the spaces for socialising and passing information and money between the village and the urban slums. This form of recruitment as daily wage labour in construction and living independently in rented shacks is preferred to other forms and is considered a better status of work and life by the labourers themselves. Reaching this state of working life is in itself as economic and social progress, which has evolved through the shared experiences of labouring households.

To sum up this section, there are three types of migrant worker recruitment that is also linked to the patterns of migration. The first one is the *contract migrant labour* system, wherein the 'labour contractors' or '*gumpumestris*' or '*mestris*' extend advance and recruit labourers for specified durations to work at long distances in the construction of irrigation and other large scale projects. The transaction takes place at the source village and the duration of contracts and, therefore, migration is usually between six to nine months. This form which is considered bonded labour and therefore, illegal, was still prevalent and was predominant compared to other forms in the central part of the Mahbubnagar district during the years 2006-2008. Whereas, this form of migration had declined in the north-western part of the district from the 1980s.

The second form which emerged in the 1980s initially with advances and later on with little or no advance was migration of labourers to cities, but residing at the construction sites and working exclusively for one labour contractor. This form is still prevalent in cities but only a few households from Chennaram work in this arrangement, but without taking any advance.

The third form, which progressively evolved over a period of time with the shared experience of labour households, is independent movement of labour households to urban centers, residing in rented shacks in slums and working as daily wage labourers. Majority of labourers/labour households from Chennaram follow this pattern and consider independent daily wage work as the least constraining form of work and life. Emergence of this independent movement and daily wage work in the cities may be considered as a social progression for the circulating labour households, but this need not follow a linear progression as it is presented here. While evidence of experiences of labour households between generations and over a period of time within a generation suggested such linear progression, it was complicated by counter

evidence, albeit very little. When I began fieldwork in Chennaram in June 2006, one household had migrated taking an advance in the contract migrant system since the preceding three years. This SC household (two adult members) migrated in September, 2006 to the state of Madhya Pradesh along with a labour contractor for an advance of Rs.13, 000 through a contract binding them for nine months. While this seemed an exception, the next year, around the same time, this and another SC household (one couple) migrated in this form of recruitment which is considered as bonded labour. All these households either used or planned to use the advance money for part of the expenses in constructing their new houses, as house loans (insufficient to complete whole construction) were sanctioned by the government. In other words, there can be occasional reversal to the forms considered as bonded and unfree labour depending on household exigencies.

## **7.2.Scale of labour circulation**

This section documents the extent of participation of individuals and households in labour circulation according to caste, gender and class differentiation of households. It also points at the changing duration of individuals/households working away from the village within an agricultural year and an individuals' lifetime. It also explores the reasons for households preferring certain specific destinations and whether the choice of places exhibits any patterns based in caste, kinship or any other factors.

A migrant labour household for the purpose of this study is a household that has at least one of its members living away from the village for wage work. This study, however, does not categorise households into migrant and non-migrant households as households that migrated in the past may have stayed back in the village during the time of census survey in Chennaram conducted for the study. It distinguishes households, therefore, into three categories: (1) households that have presently migrated (during the village survey in the year 2006-07), (2) that have migrated in the past but non-migrant during the survey, and (3) those that have never migrated. As the field survey was conducted partly during the monsoon season (stretched between August, 2006 and January, 2007), a second survey on migration was planned during the summer of 2007. This was because of the presumption that some members migrate during the first survey and some during the second survey,

i.e., after finishing *kharif* season agricultural work in the village. The aim was also to understand seasonality in migration. But after the first census survey, it was clear that most of the households had migrants during the monsoon season, and a majority of the migrants worked away from the village all through the year. Some had members to take care of cultivation, some moved out of the village immediately after the sowing season and some after *kharif* harvest.

However, most of migrants moved out of the village by November 2006 by which time only SC households were surveyed. Therefore, I re-checked, during April 2007, only the SC households surveyed, to see if any additional members of migrant households or non-migrant households had migrated. In this second phase of enumeration, eleven households had additional persons had members who left the village for work. Of these eleven households, five households already had migrants and six households had no 'presently' migrated members. That is, according to the initial survey 46 households had migrants and after adding the additional (six) migrant households, the total migrant households for the year 2006-07 was 52 households. Such additional migration had occurred from OBC and OC households too, but to a much lesser extent compared to SCs, as these households were surveyed in/from late monsoon season. As the census survey data is taken as the quantum of migration for OBC and OC households, the number of migrant households among these categories may have been slightly under-represented for the year. Some of such households not counted as migrant for the year will, however, be covered in another category, i.e. 'migrated in the past', if these households had migrated in the past but not during the survey.

As presented in Table.7.1, 78% of the SC, 70% of the OBC and 49% of the OC households migrated during the study year. In total, 66% of the village households had either one or more or all members working away from the village. But all the remaining households cannot be considered as non-migrant households. Many of these households have migrated in the past but stayed back or returned to the village during this year for various reasons – 41 out of 78 'non-migrant' households according to the village survey.

Table No: 7.1 No. of migrant households\* (present and past) and non-migrant (present) households caste wise.

Caste	Total no. of households	Migrant (present)	Non-Migrant (present)	Non-Migrant (presently)but migrant in the past	Never migrated	Total Migrant (present and past)
SC	67	52(78)	15	12	03(04)	64(95)
ST	01	00(00)	01	01	00(00)	01(100)
OBC	97	68(70)	28	17	11(11)	85(88)
OC	65	32(49)	34	11	23(35)	43(66)
Total	230	152(66)	78	41	37(16)	193(84)

\*Migrant household is a household that has at least one of its members working away from the village for wage. Note: Figures in brackets are percentages in the total households in respective rows/castes.

Table No: 7.2 No. of persons (male and female) migrated during and before the survey period and those never migrated (above 14 years of age)

Caste	Migrants (presently)		Non-Migrants (presently)		Non-Migrants (presently) past migrants		Never migrated		Migrants (present and past)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
SC	69	80	69	40	64	40	11	11	131	120
ST	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
OBC	73	98	110	79	55	44	55	34	128	142
OC	31	38	103	87	22	23	81	64	53	61
Total	173	216	284	207	142	108	148	109	313	324

Note: The migrants (presently) include only working members, while non-migrants (presently) include working as well as old age members who are non-working to depict migrant individuals in the past.

One notable reason for some households to stay back during this year was construction of houses as more than fifty house loans were sanctioned by the government. Some of them may move away from the village the next year; some of those which have never migrated may also join. The last column in the table presents the total number of households with members that migrated either in the past or during the study year. Such households constitute 95% among SCs, 88% among OBCs, 66% among OCs and 84% of the total households in the village. While this is an enormous proportion, all such households or members in these households would not be away from the village at one point in time. Some return and some move away depending on the stage of household development cycle or various other reasons like health condition of members, plans to construct a house or sink a borewell, and so on.

This large count of village households that migrated either in the past or during the survey, however, is indicative of the dependence on wage work outside the village; and these households may be called as circulating labour households. This category of households includes almost all the households that are identified as 'classes of labour'. This 'worker' class, as described in Chapter-6, constitute 78%, while circulating labour households are 84% of the of the total households in the village. The latter group also includes some households from the other class categories too, including some (nine out of nineteen households) of the cultivator/farmer class.

Only a few households (16%) have never migrated for wage work away from the village. 4%, 11% and 35% of the SC, OBC and OC households respectively, have members, neither migrated in the past nor at present. This category, however, includes some households with members either migrated for education or employed away from the village but in the formal sector. Only households with labour migrants (informal wage workers as described by Breman, 2010, noted earlier in this chapter and further discussed in the next section) are considered as migrant households for the purpose of this study.

The one factor that is common to more than half of households that 'never migrated' for wage work is the owning comparatively large holdings of agricultural land compared to migrant households. As pointed out earlier (section 4.1.1 and Table-4.2 in Chapter-4) 18 households own 10 hectares of land or more (i.e. 'medium' and

‘large’ holding categories combined). These households have never migrated for wage work.

But not all the households that never migrated for wage work own large holdings of land and their economic conditions any better than migrant households. Some of the *reddy* households, for example, whose earlier generations have not engaged in wage work, for fear of loss of prestige/status, now confine themselves to own-cultivation managing with household labour and reduced consumption. Their *fellow reddy*s who have shed such inhibitions have started engaging in migrant wage work, spend more on food and consumer goods like mobile phones and television sets. Thus, more and more *reddy* households have started migrating in the recent past and 66% of them have members who have migrated either in the past or at present for wage work. Many of the *reddy* migrant men who have never done wage work within the village have started to do so in cities. Among the OBCs some of the *golla* households had never migrated for wage work. In their case, their traditional occupation of sheep rearing has been supplementing incomes. In other words, better economic condition or fears of loss of prestige or apprehensions about working in the cities are the broadly the underlying factors that influence the choices of households that never migrated.

The number of migrants, gender- and caste-wise, is presented in Table-7.2. This table does not include dependent children who accompany their parents, some of whom also go to schools in migrant destinations. While the ‘presently migrant’ persons are all working members, the categories of ‘presently non-migrant’ and ‘migrants in the past’ include old non-working members too. The latter’s inclusion is merely to depict the migration of individuals in the past. However, all ‘migrants in the past’ are not non-working old persons. Some of them have returned to the village temporarily. This is the reason why the persons (both male and female) categorised as ‘non-farm workers’ (Chapter-6, Section 5.1.2 and Table-5.2) are more than the total ‘presently’ migrant individuals: the total persons engaged in non-farm work is 479 and total working migrants (presently) is 389. A few ‘non-farm workers’, nevertheless, were engaged within the village in self-employed work like sheep rearing or carpentry, metal work, petty shop owners, and auto rickshaw and jeep drivers etc.

Caste-wise, the average number of individuals migrated (presently) for wage work per migrant household (presently) is the highest among SCs followed by OBCs and OCs. It is 2.9 persons per migrant household among SCs, 2.5 among OBC and 2.1 among OC. This disparity reflects partly the higher tendency of migration for wage work among SCs which is related to lesser extent of ownership of land and partly their average household size which is high (average no. of persons per household among SCs, OBCs and OCs respectively is 6.1, 5.7 and 5.2). Lesser number of persons migrating per migrant household among other social groups, especially the OCs, is partly because of the importance of land and own-cultivation. At least one member in some of these households engages full time in cultivation compared to the SCs.

The spatial mobility of women for wage work is significant from this part of the region. Although considerably less compared to men, women's migration for wage work is much higher here compared to "the pattern of single male migration" of some north Indian states (de Haan, 1997:927; also see Rodgers and Rodgers, 2001; 2011)<sup>150</sup>. Gender wise, 44% of total migrant wage workers are women (numbers are presented in Table.7.2). Another important feature of circulating female labour is that there is no significant variation in the mobility of women between caste groups when compared to the proportion of circulating men in their respective castes. In other words, the difference in the proportion of women migrants between castes is determined more by other socioeconomic differences (caste and economic position) but less due to differences in gender ideologies among castes. Compared to total migrants (male and female) in respective social groups, women migrants constitute 46% among SCs, 43% among OBCs and 45% among OCs. Even the nature of work (discussed in the next section) these women engage in at migrant destinations is not different across castes.

Two important changes occurred in the trends of circulation, one with regard to caste and another with regard to time spent working away from the village. There has been an increase in scale of migration across caste groups but the rate of increase has been more stark among the OCs in recent years. The households among OCs have

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<sup>150</sup> Based on longitudinal studies, Rodgers and Rodgers (2011:46) point that migration for wage work from rural Bihar has been "almost exclusively male" and "[v]ery few women migrate for economic reasons".

started migrating mostly in the decade preceding this field study. As noted in the previous section, households from SCs and OBCs had started migrating from this village from the 1960s onwards. It became a more regular pattern from the 1980s when movement shifted towards the cities. By this time it was migration of the second generation among SCs and OBCs. Only rarely did some OCs migrate during this time. For example, Ashi Reddy worked for a labour contractor to supervise work and monitor contract migrant labourers. Otherwise, almost all of them engaged in own-cultivation, while a few worked as agricultural labour within the village.

Only the mid-1990s or so witnessed the first generation of migrant workers among the *reddys* to the cities. The fact that this trend has been recent among this caste group is also confirmed by an earlier village study in this part of the district: a village survey conducted during the summer of 2001 shows that only 16% of OCs had migrated for wage work while it was 68% among SCs and 49% among OBCs (Reddy, B, 2002; 2006). Fragmentation of land and the uneconomical nature of small-holding cultivation forced these households to migrate for wage work, which were hitherto largely into cultivation.

The other aspect of change in migration is the increased duration of working away from the village. It was initially seasonal and for some households it was only during drought years. But it has become a yearly pattern with longer durations in a year for all the households. For many the work in the village is now confined to own-cultivation and wage work, which assumes longer duration than cultivation is restricted to the cities. The second generation of migrant workers, especially men among the SCs, do not consider the village as the site of work anymore. Village is their place to get married, construct a house and buy land during their prime age. Village is their destination after retirement.

Migrant households from Chennaram live and work at various urban destinations. A majority moved to Mumbai (and its adjacent district of Thane), the other cities in the descending order of the number of migrants from this village are Nasik and Hyderabad. A very few also worked during this study in construction in Pune city and in plumber works in Kerala state. About 16 women participated in seasonal migration for agricultural work at a village in Ranga Reddy district (Chergudem, near Shankarpally town, close to the city of Hyderabad). This

worklasted usually for about two months, harvesting chillies and other horticultural crops during the *rabi* season. Most elderly women from SC and OBC households are engaged in this work in small groups that live in the shelter provided by the cultivator and work with the same employer. This stream of migration is a recent one and it may not grow further as the nature of work is agricultural which employs women.

Except in Nasik, where all the migrants from Chennaram live at one slum, they are spread in groups at various places within cities. Within Mumbai and Thane, they live at Ulhasnagar (PremnagarTekdi, Section, 4), Kalva (Ankuleswarnagar, Karegaon), Ghatkopar (Kamrajnagar), Santacruz (MumbaiUniversity, Kalina), Dharavi, Viraar, Dahisar andBhiwandi. Work is usually in the vicinity of the slums they live in. Although there is no clear segmentation based on caste in the streams of migration to various places from Chennaram, there are nonetheless such tendencies discernible to an extent.

There is a mix of castes at most of these places but at every place one group or the other is prominent in numbers. For example, *reddys* who moved to Mumbai are mostly at Ulhasnagar, although a few SCs and OBCs from this village also stay here. Most of the Chennaram migrants in the slum at Nasik are *madigas*besides a few OBCs and one OC household. Most of those at Santacruz, Mumbai are *telugu* and *golla* castes. *sakali* caste households who had been into laundry work stay since long at Dharavi besides a couple of second-generation migrant SC households engaged in construction work. *Sakali* households who are into construction work are spread out at other places. Of the 22 migrants that stay at Kalva, eight are *reddys*, eleven *madigas*and three *telugollu*. In other words, both identities of caste and the village determine the migration streams to differing degrees.

The flow of information and support through networks of caste, kinship, village and also the notion of friendship help in finding a place for rent and also work. Such cooperation has two dimensions. Information is shared to facilitate those in need of work by those already working and living at migrant destinations, underlying which isan element of obligation and a notion of helping others. But, it is also a manifestation of the need for sociability, comfort and cooperation among known people from the village at the residence and the worksite.

Although commonness of caste and the close kin groups seem slightly more prominent factors in cooperation between the households, conflict and avoidance between close kin groups (and within castes) can also determine disjunction of migration streams within a caste. For example, Hanmanthu (Case study-1) who is from the *gollacaste* continues to choose Nasik where there are no *golla* household from the village but SCs from the village are prominent in numbers. He revealed why he did not choose to go to places in Mumbai where *gollas* from the village stay. He avoids these places because his *palollu* (paternal kin members), like his paternal cousins (father's brothers' sons), with whom he had some enmity live there. He believes, at least partly, that his father ill-health before his death was a result of *shatavadi*(black magic) by his *palollu* as he suspects that they were jealous over his father's initial economic success. He, rather, prefers to stay close to his villagers that are from other castes, especially his childhood friend who is SC and also his father's friend Chennappa who is also SC who stay at Nasik. To cite a contradictory example, the Yetti (family surname) families, a close kin group from SC caste, stay together at one place (Ghatkopar) and most of the working members from these families engage in work at a common site.

The term *palu* refers to share. *Palollu* are patrilineal lineages and families that, after divisions, own a share of the common ancestral property. The relations could varyingly be cordial extending solidarity between such families or are marked with tensions and conflicts over property or personal egos and (apprehensions of) jealousies. Thus, the relations within close kin groups and within a caste could be marked by either of or in-between the extremes of cordiality and rivalry and accordingly give way to horizontal (intra-caste) or vertical (inter-caste) ties and, usually, to a selective combination of the two. Such selective combination of vertical and horizontal affiliations between households extends to the sphere of village politics, limiting the possibility of exclusive horizontal solidarity as discussed in Chapter-3. Another factor that contributes to variations in destinations rather than all caste/village households crowding at one place where the earlier generation stayed in the cities is the difficulty in finding a place in the old destinations. For example, SC households that migrated in the 1970s and 80s and stayed at Ghatkopar and Dharavi in Mumbai and some of them also own their own small dwellings in these slums. But

it was difficult for the later migrants to find living spaces at these destinations as they are overcrowded and cost of shelter had increased. The rents for the small dwellings are high and always involve huge advance deposits. Therefore, the later migrants chose Mumbai's suburban places in Thane where finding a shack in the slums was relatively easy. These difficulties notwithstanding, migration streams in general follow previous experiences of mobility and work spheres and are influenced by caste, kinship and village networks (also see McDowell and de Haan, 1997). This is how even *reddys*, the substantial land owners whose caste is considered 'dominant' in the village and region, followed not only migration streams of SCs and OBCs in the village but also adopted their work lives in the cities. Whereas SCs and OBCs had been striving, through migrating, to lead lives that some *reddys* hitherto did in the village – acquiring land, sinking borewells and settling down in cultivation.

### **7.3 Work and Life in the Cities**

The majority of the population that migrates from Chennaram live and work in the cities. Only a few women migrated for seasonal agricultural work to the adjacent district and four households migrated along with labour contractors taking advances. Most of those working in the cities were into construction and construction related works.

This tendency to prefer construction work can be explained partly, first, in terms of certain similarity in the nature of agricultural work and construction work: both require manual labour. Except the manual part that needs hard physical labour, the skills acquired in relation to cultivation activities are redundant in construction work. Thus, the whole effort and cost that the 'culture' of agriculture invests in transmitting the skills of agriculture are un-used or under-used. Besides bearing this loss on account of under-using the acquired skills in cultivation, a majority is also at a loss for not acquiring the specialised skills in construction work.

Second, historically the alternate work opportunities accessible to the manual agricultural labourers were largely through public construction of dams, roads and railways. In the absence of education and other skills, such past experiences continued to determine migration streams towards construction work.

Third, the construction industry, both public and private, had been the largest employer of labour outside agriculture, providing access to relatively regular employment for the 'unskilled' labourers. However, construction work entails various specialised branches, which require different and various levels of skills (discussed later). Besides construction and related works, migrants from Chennaram also engaged in other activities that are in the nature of casual wage or salaried but low-paid and temporary or in self-employment.

A couple of households, one from *gollacaste* and another from *reddycaste*, were self-employed hawkers at a temple in Mumbai. They sold flowers and other items used by the devotees in the rites of worship at this temple. A couple of men, one *reddy* and one SC, are car drivers for private owners in Hyderabad and Mumbai respectively. They are both paid monthly salaries by the car owners.

One *golla* youth (male) works in a power-loom textile mill in Bhiwandi. He was still an apprentice and was paid a nominal daily wage of Rs.60. Some Gollas from other villages are into this work, while his own sister's family with whom he resides in Bhiwandi is into construction work. One SC youth (male) in Nasik who used to work under a tea vendor, himself became a tea vendor, paying a certain lease amount to the owner of this small tea stall at a commercial complex. One *komati* (OC) youth (male) worked in a restaurant as a waiter and another from the same caste worked in a grocery shop, both in Hyderabad. Three *reddy* youth worked as sales boys: two of them in supermarkets (one in Nasik and another in Hyderabad) and one worked in a jewellery shop in Hyderabad. Three females (SCs), two of whom are unmarried, worked as domestic labour in Nasik. Engaging in domestic wage work in the cities by female workers from Chennaram is a rarity. It is considered, from the villagers' point of view, a degrading work compared to wage labour in construction. Such notion of this work is more to do with the apprehensions of young women working individually, isolated from other women or related men unlike in construction or agriculture where women work in groups or along with their men. The two unmarried girls engaged in this work are second-generation migrant workers. They were brought up in Nasik. They, however, consider indoor domestic work less arduous and acceptable compared to outdoor construction work. Kanakappa, who is the uncle of one of these girls, considers that though they have crossed the age of

marriage, it was difficult to find them grooms from villages. As they dress up like other urban girls and do not know agricultural work, men would be apprehensive to marry them. Only boys who are brought up like them in cities would be willing, but these boys' parents would still prefer girls from villages, he says. About ten SC households own dwellings in slums of Mumbai and Nasik and some of them stayed all their lifetimes in the cities but all of them own houses and small bits of land in the village. The next generation boys and girls of these households consider themselves as 'urban' residents and do not relate to the village life. They prefer jobs outside construction sector.

About twenty five households from Chennaram reside in temporary shacks on the campus area of Mumbai University. Some of them are employed temporarily in gardening/horticultural work at the University. At first, these and other households had engaged in cutting grass (tall grass grown to feed buffaloes) in the vast government land near Santacruz airport and the University. These lands were leased out to the highest bidders to reap grass. The contractors in turn employed wage labour to cut this feed, and sold it to dairy farms. Many, especially the *golla* and *telugu* caste, from Chennaram were employed in this work. They built temporary shelters near this area. This option of shelter without having to pay any rent made them engage in this work even though the conditions of work were quite difficult.

Although grass is not new thing to the villagers, the difficulty in this case arose for two reasons. One, cutting this grass meant stepping deep in sewage water. Continuous exposure to the stink and dirt could cause feet sores and skin diseases. Second, this work was available only early in the mornings as dealing with this grass in the sunlight would cause itches and rashes. As the work was about three hours or so they were not paid daily wage but piece rate calculated in terms of the weight of grass. After engaging early morning in this work they also did wage work in construction from nine in the morning.

Most of these lands where grass was grown is now given away for private and public construction. Working with grass has, therefore, reduced but still some are engaged in this work. Some got access to horticultural work within the university campus. The daily wage paid at the university is lower for men than in construction. But women are paid equal wages. The work is less arduous and continuous. They are

employed on a temporary basis and the wages are paid at the end of the month. They could not clearly convey if a private party contracted horticultural work on campus and employed these labourers or that the university employed them directly. Because of continuous availability of this work, and the temporary shelter on the campus, others too were eager for this employment. But it is limited to a few. Not all members in these households were employed on campus. But they lived there and engaged in cutting grass and construction work. About five *sakali* households engaged in laundry work at Dharavi, the largest slum in India. They washed clothes at the *dhobighat* and would dry them between the railway tracks adjacent to this *ghat* due to lack of space. Given the frequency of local trains running here, drying cloths was a risky affair. A couple of them from other villages had died in accidents in the recent past when trains ran over them and one of them was the husband of a woman from Chennaram.

Of all the variety of jobs listed so far, washing clothes by *sakali* households in the cities is one that is clearly associated with traditional caste ‘professions’, like in the case of barbers. Another instance of work that reinforces the caste-profession link in the cities because of economic coercion was manual scavenging by the ‘untouchable’ castes, the kind of work that other castes usually refrain from as the latter perceive such work as ‘polluting’ (Shaw, 2012; Wilson and Singh, 2012). A couple of men from *madiga* caste who have recently retired were permanently employed in Bombay Municipal Corporation to lift garbage into municipal trucks. These apart, there was no clear caste-based segmentation in the nature of jobs within casual wage work that both men and women from Chennaram engaged in the cities.

Economic status, however, reproduced the occurrence of SCs and OBCs predominantly in the low paid, manual, casual wage work in general. But within the sectors that involved casual wage work, there seemed to be an advantage in terms of wage for the SCs and OBCs compared to the OCs, not only because certain works are considered as degrading by others (as noted above), but also because of certain skills acquired due to their long experience of work in the cities, which is explained below for the construction industry.

As majority of Chennaram migrant workers were engaged in construction, the dynamics of recruitment, wages and work specialisation, and the patterns and variations in the access to work based on caste and gender are discussed here. This

discussion concerns with the dynamics of labour rather than the production process per se in construction. Workers from Chennaram are mostly employed in the construction of private housing and commercial projects. A few were engaged in manual work in private infrastructure projects in the recent years. Seven SC men were employed under a sub-contractor who undertook installation of underground cable for a private company (Reliance). These men were employed for digging the sides of roads and laying heavy cable. Only men were employed in this work and their daily wage was less than the male manual workers in construction. Some of them have worked for more than five years and were entitled to provident fund. The daily wage in this case was Rs.150, paid at the end of a month. Only those men who had been living since long at Ghatkopar, Mumbai, got access to this work. Others were employed in the small- and medium-range private constructions.

None of the labourers from Chennaram were employed in major construction projects in the cities, which largely employed labourers who were technically skilled in operating or working along with large machinery, who were invariably male. The scale of projects they engaged, presented in terms of number of floors in a building were up to a maximum of ten floors. All these constructions had various branches of work that workers with specialised skills were recruited. The different divisions that come together at various points of time in the process of construction are as follows: 'centring' - building temporary structures with metal sheets (earlier, wooden planks) to support pillars and slabs till the concrete mixture was cured and strong, iron work-structures prepared with iron rods that become permanently part of pillars and slabs, concrete work for pillars and slabs, masonry (brick work, plastering and flooring), 'tancha' work - chiseling the smooth surfaces of pillars and slabs to make them uneven for better plastering, 'parancha' work – wooden scaffold for the convenience of workers engaged in brick laying and plastering, interior designs and carpentry; besides these, other construction related works included plumbing, electrical works and painting.

The builders or the main contractors sub-let these branches of work to subcontractors. Depending on the nature of these works some are subcontracted together and some separately. Usually all masonry work, viz brick work in the construction of walls, plastering and flooring are subcontracted by one individual who

is usually referred to as *thekedar* (addressed as *seth*). *Thekedar* in turn employs *mestris* and *begaris*. Here, *mestris* are skilled workers like in laying bricks, plastering, flooring, etc. Usually *mestris* who are into brickwork also do plastering. But *mestris* specialised in flooring engage only in this branch, within which some are only specialised in stonework and some are specialised in 'tile' work. *Thekedar* employs *begaris* who are un-specialised male and female workers that work under *mestris*. They stand at the bottom of the work hierarchy. Only men engage in all specialized activities which are considered as skilled works and also as *begaris*. But women are employed exclusively as *begaris*. The work of *begaris*, both male and female, usually include carrying head loads of bricks, cement mixture, tiles and stone, and hand them over to *mestris*. Female *begaris* also carry water, sieve fine sand used for plastering, etc. Most of the works for *begaris* are common for both genders, but males are employed for lifting heavy weights like cement bags. As wages for female *begaris* are much less than the males (in Thane, for example, in 2008 females were paid Rs.150 and males Rs.220), one male for every two or three female *begaris* are employed. There is absolutely no mobility for women within the construction sector, except carrying head loads. Whereas men can move up the ladder and become *mestris* and *thekedars*. *Mestris* are employed like *begaris* but receive higher wage and are treated with respect compared to *begaris*. Their wage was usually Rs.100 to Rs.150 more than male *begaris*. This is the significant difference between a *mestri* and a *begari* in terms of income.

Some of the second-generation migrants among SCs and OBCs had become *mestris*. OCs who have joined such migrant work in the recent past are mostly at the bottom of the work hierarchy i.e., the *begaris*. Usually one learns the skills of brick laying, plastering, flooring at an early age when parents working in the cities could afford to send their boys as helpers for low wages. It is, however, difficult to explain why members from the same caste who have stayed and worked in the cities varyingly acquired skills. Caste, kinship, friendship and idiosyncratic reasons varyingly account for acquisition of skills. Some of the male youth, especially SCs and OBCs, have specialised in tile flooring, *centring*, brick laying and plastering, plumbing and painting. Youth from OCs who are a little educated do not prefer manual work and therefore, some of them chose to work as sales boys. But the wages

in such service sectors were less than the wages male *begaris* received in construction. A majority of couples among OCs who were burdened with debt and other commitments chose to work in construction. Men who had never engaged in wage work in their home villages had started wage work away from the village.

When I visited Ulhasnagar in July 2007, I greeted Ram Reddy at the *naaka*, I knew him from the village. He exclaimed to me, “this is where we do coolie, hiding from the village to protect our dignity; we can’t do the same in the village”. Ram Reddy’s family is indebted after suffering losses due to failed borewells, and expenses of his daughter’s marriage. He along with his wife and son moved to Ulhasnagar and had been working all through the year. Manjula, a young woman from the *reddycaste*, never did wage work out doors before marrying KV Reddy from Chennaram, not even in cultivation. She worked in construction along with her husband in Mumbai. She informed me that her parents do not know that she does wage work. When they suspected and asked her repeatedly, she told them that she works in a biscuit factory where work is indoors and easy, in order to console them. She actually worked for a while in a local biscuit-making firm along with other women. But she moved out of this work as the wage was too low compared to construction work. Her husband was initially employed as a car driver for a *thekedar* to transport labourers in Thane. He later joined wage work in construction for the same reason, as his monthly salary was lower than construction workers earned in a month.

Manual work in construction is, therefore, preferred compared to other less arduous informal jobs because of slightly higher wages. Further, the labour market in construction is more dynamic and flexible for labourers to change the employers. Working in groups gives them more space to negotiate with the work conditions. Several considerations influence decisions to continue or change the employer/work site. When wages are constant for a period, labourers prefer to continue to work at the same place if the *thekedar* and *mestris* are cordial. They continue if they assess that the work at a site is going to continue uninterrupted without them having to look for other employers or lose a day’s wage in between. They seek to change employers when a *thekedar* is unable to provide work for continuous days or when he is harsh and push them to work continuously in a day or when he continues to pay lower wage

when market wages increase. The employers on their part usually withhold a day's wage at the end of the week to ensure that the labourers return to work the next week.

Breman (1996) considers withholding of wage as one of the ways to tie down labour, which he calls *neo-bondage*. Such means, however, are effective but to a very limited extent for daily wage workers in construction. They may be more effective when the due wage is large and when the payment is usually made at the end of a month. Further, labourers themselves prefer to work with the same *thekedar* for a long time once familiarity and trust is established. This was noted in Chennappa's case study. Hanmanthu (case study-1) also preferred to go back to his employer, Shambu, after he returned from the village, but not until Shambu calls him and offers him the latest rate.

*Thekedars* invite bad reputations if they are harsh towards labourers or do not pay wages regularly or withhold large amounts of wage. As the labour markets operate within a limited territory, labourers, both *begaris* and *mestris*, are mostly familiar with the local *thekedars*. So, there is a constant effort by the *thekedars* to win the trust of labourers. Earning a favourable reputation to command a large number of *mestris* and labourers in turn raises their capacity to subcontract large projects and to gain the trust of builders/contractors. A *mestri* who becomes a *thekedar* and contracts small construction projects finds it more difficult to hire labourers and compete with *thekedars* who contract large projects with a substantial capacity to invest in labour. Labourers prefer the latter because they do not continuously monitor individual labourers unlike the small *thekedars* who are always at the work site to oversee work.

The mobility of *thekedars*, who were once *mestris*, but live along with labourers in the same slums, is constrained by their initial social status and capacity to command labourers. In view of their knowledge of the intricacies of work and on the quantum of work a *mestri* and *begari* can do in a day, they seek to extract maximum out of labour. Given his limited capacity to invest before the contractor could pay him his dues, he seeks to cut down the number of *begaris* under each *mestri*. This means more work for the *begaris*. Ideally three *begaris* are employed for every *mestri* to hand over things and help the *mestri* in brick work or plastering or flooring, which again depends on the number of floors the materials have to be carried to. Small *thekedars* cut down the number of *begaris* and employ only three or four *begaris* to

render support work to two *mestris*. *Begaris* find such arrangements exhausting. Such nuances in work and recruitment patterns influence the choice of labourers either to continue or change the employers. It manifests in turn in the tendency of labourers preferring employers who are socially, economically and territorially distant. This also manifests in labourers preferring employers from higher castes and/or from other regions, which is done both to avoid a potential faceoff with known people and also not to bow down to the employers from the same neighbourhood, caste or region.

Within construction the *begaris* and *mestris* required for brickwork and plastering form the largest proportion of the labourers that are required continuously for long durations. Labourers who are recruited by providing shelter at the construction site are mostly engaged in this activity. Labourers engaged in other branches of construction shift from one work site to the other more frequently. For example, those specialised in *centring* and iron work are no more required once the concrete mixture is filled for pillars and ceilings, and those specialised in flooring work enter the construction scene only after brick work and plastering are over.

Loop's (1996) description of organisation of work in construction sector in the late 1980s in Tamil Nadu cities is still suitable to the small- and medium-size building constructions, in the way construction sector is divided into various branches and the way labour in these branches is organised and put to work. But the extent of human labour employed in various activities has significantly changed. It has increased in certain specialised spheres of activities like more complex designing of floors, kitchens, interior designs that involve woodwork and plastering work. Whereas it has substantially decreased in labour intensive activities where 'unskilled' labourers were engaged. For example, digging to lay the foundation, which was manual is now done largely with heavy machinery. Another important part of construction that engaged large number of labourers at a time was in the making of ceiling which becomes both a roof and floor in multistoried buildings. A large number of labourers were employed in pouring of concrete mixture as the ceiling has to be finished in one go, which could extend sometimes late into the night. This was an activity that involved, as Loop (1996:25) noted, "the greatest number of labourers gathered on a building site at any one time".

A few men from Chennaram had engaged in the past in groups that were exclusively worked in this concrete mixture work. The work was hectic without a break and for long hours depending on the scale of the building. These gangs earned higher wages than the other 'unskilled' construction labour, but work was not continuous. They have now shifted to other branches of activity as the new technology of 'ready made concretemix' is available, which is directly pumped into ceilings and pillars. In fact, the large construction projects that constitute the expanding sector disproportionately engage less human labour with new technologies - cranes, bulldozers, modular bridges, ready made concrete mix, readymade slabs etc. Even though machinery/technology has substituted labour in construction to a significant extent in small- and medium-size projects, these absorb more manual labour. The nominal wage rates in agriculture/village, as mentioned in the last chapter, have increased threefold for both males and females in the five-year period after 2006, but they increased less than two fold in construction in the cities. Although construction provides relatively more regular employment, the new technology and the seasonality in construction work (there is generally a lull in construction activity in rainy season) undermine wages and 'freedom' to change employers.

One of the important factors that constrain spatial mobility of labour to the places that offer higher wages is the availability of shelter. Finding a place to reside is very difficult compared to finding work. The site of work and residence cannot be far off. It has to be within the convenient vicinity of residence to move back and forth between these spaces. The slums that exist or emerged are crammed and cannot expand after a certain limit. This is the reason why the ways migration streams are patterned do not simply follow the networks and affinities of kinship, caste and village. When households wish to move to a particular place where their kin or caste members are already residing, they may not find vacancies in that particular slum. They choose to move to places where they can find accommodation. In this, the contacts beyond one's kin group or caste help.

Life in the slums may be considered far below the standards of wage work. The freedom that daily wage workers in cities exercise with the employers, who independently reside, is at the cost of decent living conditions, a severe compromise in slums. Overcrowded public toilets (at some places multistoried) with no cleanliness

and proper doors and people waiting in queues, open defecation by hundreds of men in congested spaces with no notion of privacy, sewage drains overflowing, the stench of rotting garbage, and every narrow lane covered with dirt and water are some of the features of all the slums in Mumbai, Thane and Nasik, where Chennaram migrants live.

Papamma, an old woman from SC caste, visited her daughter in one of these slums. She says she returned to the village within three days as she could not use the latrines there. She says she avoided eating for three days in order to avoid those toilets. I found open defecation less cumbersome here than the over crowded latrines with men knocking on doors the moment one enters. But, for open defecation one had to contend with several men squatting at close proximity all around. Heavy rains in Mumbai and Thane add to the severity of the problems in slums. Everything in Tirupati Reddy's *jhopad*, where I stayed for more than fifteen days in July 2007, was moist and wet. Rats had bitten my feet twice during this stay and my feet were bleeding. Prabhakar Reddy, a construction labourer who stayed in the same *jhopad* during the absence of Tirupati Reddy, laughed at me for taking anti-rabies vaccination. These rats are regular visitors to *jhopads* at night, they feed on the dead skin on the feet. But all this stink and filth are not major issues for the labourers, who are on single-minded pursuit to clear a pending debt or constructing a house or sink a borewell or to send their children to 'private' schools back in the village.

Threat to the slum from the local residents in Nasik, where Chennaram and labourers from other villages stay brought them close to local Shiv Sena Party leaders. They constructed a small temple of a local deity overnight to protect the path leading to their slum (described in Case study-1). The SC youth later formed a youth organisation in the name of Ambedkar to assert their identity. Given the competition within slums for residence and other facilities, there was rivalry between the Telugu-speaking labourers and the Marathi dalits at Ulhasnagar slum. The Telugus got in touch with local Siva Sena leaders. They started organising Ganesh festivals, installing an idol during the festival and inviting the local political leaders. This move was clearly, as they revealed, to gain contact with local leaders and to assert their space in the slum and at the *naaka*.

Thus, the labourers who moved out of the villages do not accept work and living conditions passively. There is a continuous and conscious effort to improve their work conditions, to acquire skills for better pay and to assert themselves at both work and living spaces.

#### **7.4 Household incomes and economic mobility**

Migration for wage work away from the village as it has evolved over time cannot be characterised merely either as a 'survival strategy' or for 'higher incomes'. It has several meanings. Initially, during the 1950s and 1960s, when labouring households moved to the work sites of dams and canals taking advances, it was to overcome scarcities at home. This opportunity provided food at the worksite and the advance helped the consumption needs of remaining members at home. The only way a labourer, otherwise, could get substantial money for a marriage or consumption was through attached labour. It was said, two SC brothers, ran away to Bombay in the late 1960s breaking away from attached labour. From the 1970s, the option of migration provided more advance for a couple for a season than a yearly advance in the village. Since then it became a household strategy for survival and a means to break away from bondage in the village. As noted in the last chapter, OBCs started buying lands for the first time from the 1970s from *reddys* through migrant advances. Migration became a way of life for the SCs and OBCs from the 1980s since Bombay became a destination for work. The prominent aspirations in the 1980s were to avoid or break away from attached labour and buy agricultural land.

Further, borewells and construction of houses became an important preoccupation since the 1990s. For the second generation male migrants, work in the cities followed naturally. Some of them went to schools in Mumbai. Most of them spoke Marathi. Many have not seen the less-distant state capital city of Hyderabad, but are familiar with the city of Mumbai. Kankappa, referring to Mumbai and Maharashtra metaphorically, says, the land of Ambedkar liberated SCs from poverty. Kanakappa along with other SC youth have installed the statue of Ambedkar in the village. There is no overt friction with any other caste; they have included men's names from the *reddy* caste too on the foundation stone of the statue.

Usually a range of responses were given to the question ‘why have you migrated away from the village?’. Translation into English of the usual responses would mean the following:

“For survival”; “For livelihood”; “There is nothing (livelihood options) in the village”; “How can we survive on cultivation”; “How can we clear debts”; “The tank has dried up”; “Borewell has failed”; “We do not have land or sheep”; “No wage work is available in the village”; “Low wages in the village”; “Nobody wants to do *cooli* in agriculture/village”; “The *reddys* (land holders) are unable to survive on cultivation, how can we (SCs)?”; “We earn in a couple of months what we can earn in a year in the village”.

Most of the reasons cited are economic in nature. They range from economic compulsions to better income opportunities. It is a fact that migrant wage work at the basic level supports everyday consumption needs for all households categorised as *classes of labour* and also some categorised as cultivators/farmers. Because consumption is lowered to the bare minimum both in the cities and the village, it allows them to save and fulfill other commitments. Mallamma, a *golla* old woman who migrated when her husband was alive, uses an aphorism, *kadupuchinnagajesukovale, kandlupeddagajesukovale* (meaning ‘compress the stomach and keep eyes wide open’). Essentially saying that one needs to live very frugally and be very careful about how to spend one’s earning. This more or less describes how most migrant households live life. They carry provisions, like rice and jowar, as much as possible from the village in order to avoid buying the same in the cities, which would be costlier. Some of these rations would be subsidised rice through the Public Distribution System and some, like jowar is grown on one’s own farm.

With regular cash flow some of the migrants eat slightly better food compared to the households in the village. They can afford meat once in two or three weeks but it is very rare in the village across all households. Hanmanthu says, “How can we eat meat here (Nasik) when our children back home are not eating any?” The whole effort is to save and repay debts as soon as possible. To settle down permanently or to hope for a better life in the city is out of the question. The wages they earn will not allow

that. Very few among the SCs who have migrated long ago bought small dwellings in the city slums. Others now cannot even imagine doing this.

They often express that the city lets them stay only till their muscles and bones are strong. So they have to struggle and ensure a better home in the village for the life after retirement from the cities. The maximum one could achieve beyond survival in a lifetime is building a house in the village, buying a small piece of land and sinking a borewell. Achieving all the three is a rare possibility. For those who own very little land, buying land is the major aspiration. For those who have some land, sinking a borewell is a priority. Buying land was relatively easy in the 1980s and 1990s.

Since the *reddys* themselves started wage work in the cities from the 1990s, they were able to retain lands. The dowry expenses of marrying off a girl-child among *reddys* can still result in the sale of land. Achieving something beyond everyday survival is a possibility only when the working members are fit and can continuously engage in wage work. If one of them or a person in the household is injured severely or suffers from long-term illness, not only are they constrained to do wage work away from the village, but they also incur debt for the treatment. This was discussed in Hamanthu's case when his brother broke his ankles. BandakadiKanakappa (SC) and his wife used to work in Nasik. They stayed back in the village for two years as their daughter was said to be suffering from tuberculosis. The girl was admitted to Osmania GeneralHospital at Hyderabad for a long time. While Kanakappa's wife attended to her daughter at the hospital, Kanakappa kept travelling between the city and village. Such instances can bring about significant differences in the economic condition of households. To cite a different example, PalleNarsappa and Ramulamma (SC couple both above 60 years of age) both of whom had stopped migrant work. Their son and daughter-in-law would not engage in migrant work, as their son fell ill thrice when they went to work in Mumbai. They stayed back in the village and engaged in agricultural wage work. They sold off two acres of land in 2005. The remaining half acre under the *tankayacut* was left uncultivated.

Only with the recent rise in agricultural wages and NREGA works, can such households survive within the village, but any economic mobility is hard to realise. On the other extreme among SCs, PeddaKashappa's household, which was of similar economic status as PalleNarsappa's some ten years ago, had witnessed upward

mobility. Kashappa and his wife had been working along with his brother his wife for more than twenty years in Mumbai. They bought one acre of wetland under the tank from *reddys* and four acres from OBCs of a neighbouring village. However, they suffered severe losses after attempting to sink a borewell. Only the sixth attempt was successful. They are on the move to repay the debts, while their younger brother and his wife took care of cultivation. Persons like Kashappa and Chennappa (case study-2) and their families are considered as role models to be followed by others. Likewise, JPentappa, a youth from the *telugucaste*, is a role model for the younger generation as he learned and specialised in tile work (flooring) that pays higher wage. Similarly, Ravi (SC) was also looked up to as learnt plumbing.

Everyone uses the English word ‘develop’ which in their view conveys some sense of economic mobility. It underlies the cultural ethic that evolved around work – earning and acquiring productive assets. Such notions are shared across castes. One who works hard without drinking and saves money, repays debt promptly and who contributes to the economic betterment of the household receives appreciation and respect. One who fails in school or college finds appreciation when he learns a new skill and earns money at an early age, even more than one who is still in school. Work in cultivation, either own or for wage, are neither rewarding in terms of money nor in terms of the sense of ‘freedom’ that youth enjoy in the cities. The city life is attractive and exciting. It provides the opportunity to visit movie theatres, buy mobile phones and so on. It offers them pride when they return to the village with a gadget in their hands. The youth in the village seek to emulate this lifestyle. Between 2006 and 2008, the number of villagers using mobile phones had rapidly increased. Mostly, it is the migrant youth among SCs and OBCs that bought them first, the second-hand ones. Earlier it was music players, small portable transistors that were displayed proudly.

Until a decade ago, many children among the SCs and OBCs would start as attached labour for grazing cattle and cleaning cattle sheds. Now they are mostly into school. Most of them fail class 10 or intermediate and engage in various works in the cities. Crossing the threshold in education that can provide regular salaried employment is still an exception across all households that stay and study in rural areas. The whole effort and time that goes in educating children till class 10 or intermediate becomes redundant in economic terms as they largely engage in manual

work even after that. The important aspect besides the significance of consumer goods and urban life for the youth, however, is that all young males contribute to household incomes from migrant work. Only a few girls can do this before marriage and only those who accompany their family members engage in wage work outside the village. Once they reach marital age they are left in the village along with the remaining members of family till they are married off. It is these unmarried girls and old women that largely engage in agricultural wage work.

Almost every household working in the cities is indebted to an extent. Indebtedness, however, cannot be inferred as the main cause of out-migration across households. The nature of which is different in different cases. For example, a household engaged in cultivation incurring a loss on the investment that is in the first place financed through credit or Hanmanthu taking credit for the treatment of his brother when the latter had an accident, is different from the debt incurred to buy land or build a house. Households incur debt with a view to repay them through migration. Moneylenders extend credit because of the assurance that debtors would pay them through migrant remittances. The potential in migration raises their creditworthiness. The inflow of money from the cities has transformed some small-time moneylenders into substantial ones. About five *reddymen* in this village lend money. But the amount of money that one, K.Reddy lends outweighs all others combined. Except these five households, all the other *reddy*households that depend purely on cultivation are severely constrained economically. No one saves enough money for an undertaking like house or borewell or marriage. Rather, they first incur debt and spend on their requirements and then work and repay the debt.

Therefore, it appears that everyone is working in the cities only to repay a debt. But once the pending debt is cleared they incur a fresh debt for a fresh plan or family commitment. Thus, they are always in a state of indebtedness. It is often said that unless one is indebted one will not be on one's toes and work. K.T.Reddy and his brother's family got separated. He was required to construct a house of his own. He received Rs.30,000, a government loan, for his house and incurred an additional Rs.70,000 debt to complete the house. He leased out his land. Then, he and his wife went to work in construction to repay this debt.

During the field study, it was common to see households locking the door of the newly constructed house and immediately moving to cities to work. Construction of new houses was a compulsion in view of either the collapse/deterioration of the old house or division of families in which the parent house was too small to run two or more households. It is not rare that families do not divide because lack of house or potential to build a house. The option of migrating can keep them separate (independent economic units) without having to divide, but when they visit village, they stay in the same house. The land and the parent's house remain together, and the one staying in the village takes care of cultivation and offers the remaining ones their share. Division in such cases requires construction of new houses. In order to have a 'home' at the village, they extend the act of division until they are ready to construct a house of their own.

Most of the indebtedness in the village was a result of housing, borewells and marriage. And, migration plays a crucial role in enabling them get credit for all these purposes. It plays an important role in the investment in agriculture. This investment ranges from meeting the yearly input costs in cultivation, to drilling a borewell, and in some cases, to buy a piece of land. In some case, it takes the form of clearing crop loans taken from banks. Some of them are sending children to small English-medium private schools paying monthly fees and monthly autorickshaw fares from the village to the mandal headquarters. This long-term investment on education for children is now taken seriously by some families. There is a lot of hope that the new generation in these families may get better jobs that involve no manual work.

One way of meeting the emergency needs at home or to clear a debt on time is to participate in 'chitti' group (chit funds), as briefly mentioned in case study-1. Usually a group of men, and women separately, ranging from ten to twenty members come together for the same number of weeks or months and deposit a fixed amount of money accordingly either weekly or monthly. On the day of depositing one of the group members claims the money either through lucky draw or through an auction-like system, every member gets one chance. One who bids to forego the highest amount gets to withdraw money in the latter method. Depending on the urgency for money, one decides to bid. This way the one who claims money in the initial stages of the 'chitti' time gets a lesser amount. But because it is in advance compared to the full

paying time, they choose to bid for larger amount of loss. The logic in chitti works out as an interest on money credited or debited. The one whose financial situation is not compelling stands to gain. One who manages all the accounts gets a commission on the day of deposits and withdrawals.

K.T Reddy was part of a fifteen-member group that had OCs and OBCs as members at Ulhasnagar. They deposited Rs.2,000 per month with a maximum fixed amount one could get was Rs 30,000, until all members get their turn. Before returning home he bid against Rs10,000 and got Rs 20,000 to repay his debt in the village he had taken for his house. Like K.T.Reddy most of them are in chitti groups at migrant destination. When the debt has to be cleared at a particular time and/or before returning home they withdraw money. 'Chitti' is one of the major aspects of interactions between households at migrant places. Women, besides being in chitti groups that involve small amounts of money, continue to be members of Self Help Groups back in the village. The loaned money to these groups is either usually shared among members and used on consumption and other needs, or altogether lent out on higher interest to someone else in need. The interest is shared among members. When they share and use the loan amount, their share of loan is repaid through migrant remittances.

In summary, there is a significant impact of migrant wage incomes across all sections of households. The households are stretched between home village and urban slums. The household economy is organised varyingly around own-cultivation, agricultural wage and urban wage work. Depending on the household situation and working members and the extent of land, some or all members engage in cultivation during the sowing time and return to wage work in the cities. In some cases, one of the members takes care of cultivation and also children at home while others mostly work in the cities. Some stay most of the monsoon season in the village and engage both in own-cultivation and agricultural wage, like Kajamma (case study-2) and join urban wage work in the winter and summer season. Migration for wage work contributes beyond the mere subsistence needs in view of lowering consumption levels and living standards. Thus, non-farm incomes not only form a major part of the household incomes, but also contribute to investments in cultivation. Non-availability of agricultural labour during peak seasons due to migration and prioritising of own-

cultivation by the marginal and small holding households due to increased investment capacity in cultivation, among others, have caused an increase in wage rates in agriculture.

With increasing creditworthiness, migration also contributed to housing, borewells and buying of land in considerable number of cases besides meeting the expenses on marriage and sickness. From the point of view of the villagers, in terms of buying of land and better housing, a significant number of households witnessed economic mobility. However, given the status of agriculture, there are limits to such mobility and it only manifests more clearly in the extent of land and not in the returns from it.

Another significant trend that is bound to have an impact in the long run is acquisition of skills by men within manual wage work from the SC and OBC households. There is an advantage for some of the households from these sections, which have long experience in migrant work. This observation conforms to the larger pattern of caste-wise wage segmentation within casual wage work in urban India.

## Chapter-8

### Conclusions

The major conclusions of this study pertain to two broad interrelated areas, *viz.* agrarian and social change, with a focus on the changing conditions of labouring populations. These conclusions are drawn focusing on the phenomenon of labour circulation both in itself as well as its influence on social and agrarian changes. Further, certain important associated aspects are highlighted and presented in two sections.

Predominance of household labour supplemented by new technology: With increasing dispersal rather than concentration of land, cultivators of various landholding sizes increasingly manage cultivation with household labour and new technologies rather than hired labour. Small and marginal owners of land increasingly depend on wage work outside agriculture and this trend has been observed since the 1980s (Byres, 1981; Harriss, 1982). But a significant aspect of this development is that these small owner-cultivators too, increasingly employ machinery and other technologies to substitute labour (both household labour and hired labour) and engage in wage work outside agriculture, largely in the cities.

Unavailability of *regular* wage work had been one of the major reasons of outmigration of labouring households. Increasing migration of these households led to scarcity of agricultural labour during peak agricultural activities. In response to such a situation, the main landowning households substituted hired labour with technology, which later further displaced hired labour in agriculture. On the other hand, the majority of small and marginal owners of land increased their time in wage work away from the village and these incomes are used to employ technology and reduce household labour in own-cultivation. While mechanisation and other new labour replacing technologies reduced hired labour relative to household labour among the substantial land owning households, except during peak seasons. Small and marginal holding households increased mechanisation to reduce household labour in cultivation and spent more time labouring in the cities. In other words, mechanisation has been a strategic way out for different land size-class households to increase incomes in

different ways. One, to substitute hired labour and while the other free themselves for wage work in the cities.

In a context of semi-arid/ 'backward' agriculture and unavailability of wage employment in the home village, labour outmigration has contributed to an increase of mechanisation and a decline in agricultural wage employment and paradoxically increase in agricultural wage rates in the recent years. The process of migration of households contributes not only to supplement the incomes from unviable small holdings of land, but also facilitates technology-intense cultivation that is financed by labouring away from the village. After intermittent failures, droughts and losses from failed borewells, cultivation is gradually restored by toiling in the cities.

Decline in dependency relationships and assertion by 'lower' castes: The material basis of 'dominance' i.e. land (Dumont, 1988/2009) that manifested as 'control' of labouring and land-poor households in the past has largely withered. There is no 'single caste' or families that have "effective control" of the village (Mendelsohn, 1993:806). On the one hand the decline in the size of landholdings with no substantial improvements in land productivity has resulted in downward economic mobility of the resident cultivating *reddy* caste families. And on the other, there has been a decline in dependence of labouring households on cultivator families as a result of the increased availability of migrant wage work.

Dependence on landowning *reddy* caste families for wage work as well as for loans has almost disappeared. There has been an increase in moneylending activity with increasing creditworthiness of circulating labour. But debt relations are now more commercial and disconnected with labour employment. The major source of loans for 'lower' caste families to meet everyday consumption or marriage expenses in the past was done by 'mortgaging' one's labour in the form of attached labour contracts (*jeetham*). The break from attached labour, has brought about significant qualitative change in the relations between the larger landowning and land-poor families and castes where particularly male labour avoids daily wage work with cultivators. The most important expression of assertion by men across castes, and especially by SC men, is in avoiding wage work in agriculture. Jodhka (2012:10) noted a similar trend in rural Haryana. "Working with farmers implied accepting their

domination and power. By refusing to work on land, dalits expressed their dissent against the traditional structure of patron-client ties”.

Despite these fundamental changes in land, caste and labour relations, there are spheres in which a few substantial landowning *reddy* caste families still wield considerable influence. A couple of *reddy* families are active in village electoral politics, but their influence draws not from land or cultivation but from their connections with local politicians, contracting of small public works and their ability to spend money during elections. There was one such *reddy* (a moneylender) who had been a *de facto* village *sarpanch* for two consecutive terms (before and during this field study), when the post was reserved for backward castes (Appendix-2). Such influence, however, does not go unchallenged. Almost every caste group has young male members who are active in village politics and also mediate between villagers and government officials in the sanction of house loans, pensions etc.

### **Agrarian Change**

The structure of landholding in the study village has drastically changed over the last 50 years or so. Inequality in ownership of land has reduced but is still significant. A couple of families held more than 250 acres of land three generations ago, and even till about 1990 at least five families had more than 50 acres of land. During the field study only three families held between 20 and 30 acres of land. About three-fourths of the owners of land held small and marginal holdings. This was a drastic change given that the average size of landholding in semi-arid regions is usually higher than in wet land regions.

There was not only fragmentation of land due to growth of population and inheritance divisions across sections but there was also transfer of land through sale mostly from erstwhile big landowning caste of *reddys* to the ‘backward’ castes, especially the OBCs. This became possible because of migrant incomes for many and through sheep rearing for the traditional shepherd caste. Yet, the OCs who constitute slightly less than 30% of the village households own about half of the village land. However, 40% of them own only small and marginal holdings. On the other extreme, SCs that constitute 30% of the households own 16% of the agricultural land, and nearly three-fourths of them own only marginal holdings.

Ownership of land, even for most of those with substantial lands, did not translate into economic mobility or a shift to new enterprising avenues because of the lack of productive development in rainfed agriculture. The state's neglect and bias against dryland agriculture has forced cultivators to shift to irrigated crops like paddy that received support from the State in irrigated regions.

Private investment in borewell irrigation technology had some promise initially but resulted in a groundwater crisis and losses of investment from the late 1990s. The increase in total extent of irrigation in the district by the 1990s due to groundwater irrigation has once again reduced to the levels that were at the beginning of the decade because of a steep reduction in tank and openwell sources. This study shows that there is significant disparity in access to groundwater irrigation (shown in Chapter-4). Furthermore, all the landowners under the command area of tank have been deprived of irrigation since the tank dried up from 1998-99 in the study village. The same trend is reflected in the district at large going by official statistics. Earlier, altogether 131 households had access to irrigation under the tank (apart from the openwells) in the village. But during the field study only 83 households had access to irrigation under borewells. This modern technology which was believed to be more equitable compared to the traditional technologies, has created greater disparity in access to irrigation compared to the disparity in landowning pattern.

The threshold of viability of the landholdings could not be reduced for a majority of the households due to limitations in irrigation and lack of significant technological improvements in rainfed agriculture. Households among the SCs and OBCs have been migrating for wage work since the 1960s but this trend increased from the 1980s when the wage work shifted to construction work in the cities. Fragmentation of land on the one hand and losses in borewells and unviability of rainfed cultivation has forced cultivator households from the *reddy* caste to migrate for wage work, which had not engaged in wage work earlier in the village. This trend has been a reverse mimesis by the 'upper' caste families adopting the 'lower' caste working lives since the mid 1990s.

About four-fifths of the households now engage in wage work inside and outside the village owning land ranging from about a quarter acre up to ten acres. Wage incomes constitute a major part of household incomes for about three-fourths of

the total households that own mostly below five acres of land. These households are neither wage labourers nor peasant cultivators, but are 'classes of labour' (Bernstien, 2010) – they neither own sufficient land nor are dispossessed of land.

### **Village, caste and 'footloose' labour**

Labour circulation between the village and the city is no longer a transient phenomenon anymore; nor is it only seasonal. The city is the place for work. Urban slums and construction sites are extended villages. These are households with dual hearths and residences. But urban spaces allow them only on the fringes and only till their bodies are strong. Therefore, these households continuously strive to secure housing and economic viability in the village. The only way out in the village is to improve cultivation. Lowering consumption and living costs, these working members use migrant remittances for agricultural inputs, repaying crop loans in banks and service debt incurred for house construction, borewells etc.

The scale of migration for wage work has been increasing. The duration of stay away from the village for wage work also has been increasing. 66% of households during the field survey had one or more or all household members employed away from the village in casual work mostly in construction. Around half of the remaining households had migrant members in previous years. About half of the OC households and nearly four-fifths of the SC households had migrants.

Contrary to the assumptions, MGNREGA did not reduce labour migration. Given the long-term plans of households and availability of regular wage work in urban construction, MGNREGA is not considered a preferred option by these households. A few who stayed back for various reasons availed MGNREGA work, of which a few households availed more than a 100 person-days of work. Large-scale migration on the one hand and MGNREGA on the other have contributed to a threefold increase in agricultural wage rates (nominal wages) for both men and women within five years of implementation of the Act. This increase is paradoxical as it is accompanied by a decline in the availability of wage work in agriculture due to employment of machinery in tilling land and harvesting. Further, the use of herbicides in recent years has been replacing hired labour even in weeding activity, which was labour intensive.

Debt-bondage and unfree labour relations had been an area of concern and debate since long both in agriculture and non-farm sectors in India. The *bhagela* or *jeetham* system was prevalent in this region since pre-Independence times, which was similar to *jita*, *pannaiyal*, *padial*, *kamia*, *hali* etc that occurred in other parts of the country. Although all such forms were abolished in India since 1976, attached labour continued, although reducing, till the 1990s. This form has almost disappeared in the village and the major contributing factor for this has been the option of migrant wage work. Initially, labourers entered bonded contracts to break away from bondage in the village. Later on, the present generation of workers shifted to daily wage work in the cities.

The, preference for migrant workers over locals has been considered as employers' strategy to ensure cheap and docile labour (Breman, 1996). But, it is observed in this study that it is also the labourers' conscious strategy to avoid local employers, instead they prefer non-local employers. Such avoidance/preference is observed both in the village and in the cities. Working away from the village manifests in avoidance of work for others within the village and assertion of independence. Further, the employers and *mestris* from the same village or region are consciously avoided in the cities. Labourers prefer to work under those whose social, regional and linguistic identity is distant. The attempt is not to submit to anyone in the village where their dignity is at stake, and to those individuals and groups that are from similar social hierarchy in the cities and work places as that of village. Thus, spatial mobility of labouring households assumes meanings in the context of social relations in the home village that go beyond economic considerations.

One of significant aspect of migration in this region is the higher participation of women in migrant wage work compared to north Indian states. Women in the study village constitute 44% of migrant wage workers. There is no significant variation in mobility in terms of gender across castes. They are proportionately as mobile as men in their respective castes. But work opportunities are limited for women in non-farm sectors. They are restricted to the lowest and most menial work in construction. The 'skilled' work in construction is highly gendered and excludes women. The expanding large-scale construction projects that employ new technologies exclude women more

than men and compared to small and medium scale constructions. However, migrant women across castes are into wage work in construction.

There is a possibility for acquisition of skills within and outside construction work in the cities for young men. Young men consider work in the cities as their natural destination and not agricultural work. Some of the second-generation migrant workers from the SCs and OBCs have acquired skills within construction. Some of them are specialised in bricklaying, flooring, plumbing, painting and other construction-related works. They receive higher wages compared to 'unskilled' workers. While the majority of OCs who are first-generation wage workers in the cities and in construction are restricted to low paid unskilled work. A few of them with little education, find service sector jobs as sales boys which pay less compared to manual wage work in construction.

One of significant outcome of the long experience of SCs and OBCs in migrant wage work in the cities is that they are more advantaged in terms of skills and wages within sectors that involves manual work and that offer casual wage work like construction. This conforms to the larger trends of segmentation within casual wage employment in terms of wages. OBCs and SCs also to an extent receive on average higher wages in urban India<sup>151</sup>. Caste-related specialisations, acquisition of new skills due to long-term experience in migration and their segmentation within manual work seem to explain this trend.

Caste-specific traditional services have declined. Only a few families from the washermen caste still practice their traditional occupation. But it is reproduced more in urban areas than in the village. By and large the majority of households across all caste groups in the village are into similar manual work either in own cultivation or agricultural wage work or in construction in cities. The 'classes of labour' is a phenomenon across all caste groups. But the 'cultivator/farmer' class and the 'rentier' class, which comprise a few households in the village, are exclusively from the *reddy* caste.

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<sup>151</sup> The trends from NSSO data presented in Chandrashekar and Ghose, 2014 suggest this.

The changing labour relations and agrarian change facilitated and reinforced by labour circulation in a semi-arid region of India, does find resonance in the larger changes observed in Indian agrarian relations. The persistence of small farms and the sustained back-and-forth movement to urban centres for wage are today realities in several regions of India. The observations of the study presented in brief in this concluding chapter do warrant sustained and closer analysis. An understanding of these micro-level negotiations by labouring populations will enhance academic debate.

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Synopsis

of the Ph.D dissertation titled

*Labouring In and Away from the village: A study of Labour, Circulation and Agrarian change*

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(Regn.01SAPH01)

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## Introduction

India witnessed a historic moment –the working population engaged in agriculture is for the first time outweighed by those working outside agriculture. It raises many questions: one of them being if *the village is withering*? Another, being, if *footloose labour* is now increasingly the norm? The increasing workforce outside agriculture has not, however, resulted in a proportional decline in cultivator households. Labouring populations seek work in the city but continue to hold on to land and to the village. This study revisits these ‘old’, yet critical questions of *land, caste and labour*, viewed from the lens of a *village study* in Telangana, a semi-arid region of India.

### **Focus and approach of the study**

This study is focused broadly on the conditions of labouring households *of* a village in Telangana. It may be noted at the outset that it is in this region that *the first full-length anthropological study* of the ‘Indian Village’ originated. S.C. Dube’s *Indian Village* (1955) was a study of *Shamirpet* village near the city of Hyderabad, conducted during the years 1950-51. The present study is conceptualised in the context of evidence that suggests extreme fragmentation of agricultural land, ‘agrarian crisis’ and increasing labour migration from rural areas. A study of the conditions of rural labour inevitably includes the phenomenon of present-day labour circulation and the larger realm of agrarian change. Such a study in India would include a focus on the significance/influence of caste structures in shaping the conditions and forms of labour. As a student of *an* anthropology that emphasises the material basis of interactions between castes – of ‘dominance’ and ‘dependence’ – this study also attempts to understand how agrarian change, which involves fragmentation of land and circulation of labour, influences the relations between castes in a village.

The purpose of the study was born out of a preliminary reading that there was a decline in village-level studies that focused on the dynamics of social change in the rural milieu. These were serious concerns across disciplines in India, especially since the recognition of ‘dominant caste’ in social anthropology and ‘gentlemen farmers’ (the ‘gold rush’) in agrarian political economy. The ‘liberalisation’ policies of the Indian state,

in general and more specifically with reference to agriculture, since the early 1990s drew attention once again to the countryside, but the focus this time has largely been on 'agrarian crisis' as a result of such policies, overlooking the caste and class dynamics at work.

Further, this region, Telangana, from where a village once notionally represented the *Indian Village*, like other such semi-arid regions, experienced a trajectory of agricultural (under)development different from regions that witnessed the 'green revolution'. The agrarian transformation in the latter regions received scholarly attention with regard to caste and class dynamics and 'new farmers' movements', while there has been a dearth of scholarship in this area in the 'dry' regions.

The study draws from the approach followed in agrarian political economy, which focuses on "the social relations and forms" of "agricultural production and reproduction, property and power" and the dynamics of "technical change". Further it involves the dynamics of class relations - "on the ways more powerful classes" accumulate "by appropriating surplus from less powerful [classes]", and whether there are conditions for labour to exercise the right to freely hire out for the existing highest wage or whether such freedom is curtailed to any degree through any means in the process of accumulation.

The political-economy approach emphasises structural inequality within the countryside and between the farm and non-farm sectors, which underlie the "social and spatial arrangements of [the] economy". While inequality within the village in terms of ownership of land and other assets has significantly reduced, migration of households in the study is understood largely in the context of persistence and increase of unviable small-farms and the spatial separation of and the relations between the sites of production/employing economy and reproduction of labour. In understanding circulation of labour and also the sustenance of 'backward' agriculture, the study draws from the conceptions of production and reproduction as elaborated by Kautsky (1899/1988), Burawoy (1976) and others. The spatial differences in the cost of reproduction reduces production costs in the non-farm sector and sustains circular migration of labouring

households on the one hand, and on the other, the incomes from migrant wage labour contributes to the reproduction of otherwise unviable small-farms.

Besides adopting such a perspective, the study also focuses on the significance of caste, gender and kinship and their roles. The assertion of 'lower' castes and the aspirations of the youth are considered important elements that go beyond the economic 'determinist' interpretation of circulation. The study largely being qualitative in nature, modestly attempts a description of the 'everyday' lives of labourers recognising agency on the lines of James Scott's (1985) 'everyday forms of resistance' and Geert deNeve's (2005) 'everyday politics' of labour. It attempts to document everyday struggle for livelihood and the individual's/household's conscious strategies that are aimed not only towards incremental improvements in household economic situation but also towards resisting and challenging the unequal relations and attitudes in the village and the city, which are rooted in caste hierarchies. In such an analysis, the study engages with the relevant notions of bondage, 'free' and 'unfree' labour and the forms of labour that manifest in such relations. It seeks to understand how individuals involved conceive such forms of labour and their efforts at moving away from relations that constrain their freedom and undermine their dignity, and how past/shared experiences shape such strategies.

This study, in the tradition of *village studies* in India, considers the *village* a unit of study for its analysis but also takes into account the spatial stretch of the village households that link the household and village economy with non-farm sectors and urban centres. Instead of depending solely on the second hand narratives of migrant workers in the village, the field study is extended beyond the village borders, to the destinations of migration— urban slums and work sites.

Attwood (2010:42) notes that the “difficult” and “universal problem in social sciences” is to do “justice” to both empirical “variations” and “patterns”, and offer “convincing explanation(s) of these patterns”. Because the households within a village do not exhibit homogeneity in their socioeconomic character and in their position in the division of labour, one had to find valid categories to infer patterns and make sense of the socioeconomic system and its interactions. Anthropologists had initially found caste a useful lens through which to analyse social and economic relations in Indian villages. In

course of time, however, studies found the social cleavages of caste that guided and/or coincided with economic roles in the past tended to be blurred. The divisions that a production system entailed were no more strictly based on or coinciding with the lines of caste. It brought about heterogeneity in terms of caste within similar economic roles. Therefore, it was required to search for other relevant categories that are based in the criteria that determine economic roles. This study employs the concept of class to differentiate village households on the lines that some anthropologists have applied it in the context of the Indian village– the criteria of ownership of the means of production (primarily land) and labour services rendered or hired.

However, since the time such studies were done both the production system as well as the households engaged in it are now more linked to the economy beyond the boundaries of the village, thereby making it difficult to propose any simple classification of the latter based on such criteria. Moreover, the ownership of land or labour no longer remain the *exclusive* criteria to distinguish the character of a majority of the households. To put it simply, the classes/households *of* the village were engaging in the system of production in different (sometimes previously considered ‘contradictory’) capacities – a member of a landowning household works for a wage inside and/or outside the village, another works in the non-farm sector, another cultivates the household’s land by hiring labour. So, classes/households were neither purely agrarian nor were they exclusively landowners or sellers of labour power. Thus, class categories such as agricultural labourers, tenants, landlords, peasants (small, middle, rich) are found to be less appropriate to define/identify rural households from the field area.

The study, therefore, adopts Bernstein’s (2010a&b) concept of ‘classes of labour’. The character of a majority of households in the study village fits the notion of *classes of labour*, in that they are neither dispossessed of land nor do they own sufficient land but depend largely on wage labour. Although these households engage mostly in wage labour outside the village they maintain an active relationship with land and the village. Such households can neither be termed agricultural labour nor rural labour as they variously combine agricultural (village) and non-farm (urban) wage labour along with own-cultivation. Using the notion of *classes of labour*, the study documents the segmentation

within these classes based on relevant criteria such as the extent of land owned and the nature of wage employment. In doing so, it also analyses the overlap and/or disjunction between class divisions and divisions of caste, as was usefully attempted by Beteille (1996) in his village study.

### **Objectives of the study**

One could draw that studies so far have focused on various aspects of agrarian change in general and also on the conditions of labourers in particular. However, one finds that there is a deficiency of research on the impact of labour out-migration and the non-farm incomes on the rural household and village economy and further, on the social relations in the villages. Studies have indicated how ‘crucial’ migrant incomes have become on the rural households in recent times. But beyond such incomes, there is very less that is known on the economic mobility of rural households.

More importantly, studies that focused on the ‘departing end’ of migrant households i.e. villages, usually considered rural migrant labour as ‘unskilled’ labourers contributing migrant incomes. There is little that is known on the individuals with varying education levels and resources that acquire skills within casual wage work that may have significant differential impact on household economy and mobility. There is a lacuna in the understanding on the long term experiences of migration and migrant work and how such experience shapes the changing choices of work and access to such work. As the studies usually adopt survey method and focus on household economic diversification and incomes, the focus is very less on the changing social relations within villages. Only a few exceptions are found focusing on the qualitative aspects of village life involving systematic study in recent times (for example Harriss et al, 2010; Jhodka, 2012). Even such studies hardly paid sufficient attention to the detail of the nature of work that men and women involve away from the village, inter-generational changes in such work and the possible variations between caste and age groups and its varying impact on households. On the other hand, studies that focused on migrant workers in the urban centres or informal sectors did not connect the meanings and importance of such work in the context of home villages. This lacuna was also already pointed by scholars (Breman *et al*, 1997).

Another deficiency one finds in the literature that has not been captured yet is the nature of employer labourer relations in the context of increasing fragmentation of land. Literature suggests increasing pressure on land and predominance of small and marginal farms but how labour is organised in agriculture is not sufficiently understood. Rural labour relations were largely analysed in terms of binary categories i.e. employers and labourers. Whether distinct categories of ‘agricultural labourers’ and ‘land owners’ still obtain in such a context is another question. How it changed and how it varies across sections of cultivators and how out-migration of labour affects such employment relations in a village setting seems an important dimension in understanding social relations in the village.

This study, therefore, seeks to understand some of these aspects taking village as a unit of analysis while attempting to cover the linkage of village households’ economic and social life beyond the village. It is situated in a context of changing land structure and out-migration of labour. It seeks to understand, broadly, the conditions of labour households and the process of labour migration and its impact on the household economy in the village. Further, it attempts to map the change in social relations in the village through an analysis of changing agrarian relations. In such an attempt, this study sets out the following specific objectives:

- 1.To map and understand agrarian transition in historical and regional context; to understand and document the present state of agriculture and the extent of its significance for the livelihoods of village households across different sections.

- 2.To understand the material and social conditions of households and how such conditions influence spatial mobility of individuals/households that live and work away from the village, and explain socioeconomic patterns in the village.

- 3.To understand the role of migrant labour on household and village economy; the possibilities of economic mobility are explored.

- 4 To analyse the impact of labour migration on the nature of economic interactions between castes and households; how the interactions between castes that in the past were distinguished by the degree of the possession or absence of socioeconomic power in the

village are continuing or changing. This is analysed through the changing arrangements and exchanges of labour service, the relations between the employers and labourers and, broadly, the changing agrarian structure

### **Methodology**

This research is based on an intensive study of a village on the lines of anthropological village studies in India. But the fieldwork in this study extended beyond the village following migrating workers. Hence, it also includes some urban slums and work sites.

Fieldwork involved collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in the village. At first I stayed in the mandal headquarters renting a room for about two months and visited the village every day during this period to build a rapport and to gain a preliminary understanding of the caste dynamics in the village.

As I belong to a caste that is also part of the village under study, I was open to the possibility of my caste identity influencing the rapport I could gain with different caste groups. Therefore, I decided to visit the village for some time and build a rapport with all caste groups before I could move into the village. Initially I visited mostly the SC households while at the same time meeting with others. After two months, I got a small vacant house of a *reddy* woman without any fixed rent. The owner of the house had moved to her son's house to take care of her grandchildren as her son and daughter-in-law moved to Mumbai for wage work. This is where I stayed and cooked food for myself. The landlady also provided food many a times.

Quantitative data was collected through a census survey covering all the 230 households of the village. Individual- and household-level data was collected through a household schedule. The schedule contained questions on various aspects both at the level of individuals *viz* age, sex, education, occupation, migration status (past and present), etc. At the household level, it consisted of questions of land (wet and dry), source of irrigation, cattle, whether land is cultivated or any part of it left fallow, land bought or sold roughly in the previous 15 years and from/to which caste group households, etc.

Qualitative data was collected through informal and semi-structured interviews with questions varying depending on the occupational/caste status of the individual and household. Observations during work, negotiations of work and wages, life in the village and the slums etc. not only provided useful insights but formed the basis of further questions.

I used a voice recorder during some of the interviews when time was fixed for an informal interview with the consent of the respondents. I collected about 50 such recorded interviews ranging from 20 minutes to more than two hours in some cases. Many times notes were taken after informal conversations with individuals and groups.

The major part of the year between June, 2006 and March, 2007 was spent in the village taking breaks in between. In April 2007, I travelled to Nasik along with a household that formed a detailed case study for this research. I stayed in the same slum as that of my respondents. One vacant *jhopad* (shack) whose owner had returned to the village (neighbouring Chennaram) was offered to me by his kin member. Here I observed living and working conditions, observed negotiations at the labour point, followed labourers to construction sites, and in the evenings I interviewed villagers from Chennaram.

Similarly, I did fieldwork at Ulhasnagar (Thane district, adjacent to Mumbai) in July 2007 staying in a *jhopad* rented in by Tirupati Reddy from Chennaram. I spent 20 days at this slum. Later in March 2008, I spent 15 days in Chennaram and collected information about various members staying in Mumbai. I spent the whole of April 2008 in Mumbai staying most of the time at one slum at Kalva (Thane). Later I stayed with a friend at IIT, Mumbai and visited other slums from there.

This fieldwork enabled me to understand the nuances in the process of circulation of labourers, work options and living conditions in urban slums. Further, as the majority of working age persons of the village live and work in the cities, limiting the site of fieldwork to village alone provides a partial picture of the village.

## **Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation is organised into the following chapters. The first chapter introduces the study and engages with the empirical trends in agrarian change and labour, and the perspectives that capture these trends in the literature. Further, this chapter states the study's specific objectives, the methodology of the study.

The second chapter provides a historical account of agrarian relations in Telangana. It documents from historical sources and other literature the relations of land and various forms of labour and the conditions of labourers. The third chapter presents a brief profile of the district, and of village based on census survey conducted as part of the field study and other qualitative information. Social composition, literacy and education levels, material conditions and a brief discussion on village politics is presented in the second part of this chapter. Fourth chapter deals with the changing landholding pattern and technological aspects of agriculture in the village situating in the larger regional context. It deals with the risks and disparities in groundwater irrigation and the state of rainfed agriculture.

The fifth chapter deals with the problem of categories in analyzing households' socio economic position with regard to land and labour. It offers classifications both at the level of individuals and households and analyses the predominance of 'classes of labour'. Further, it presents three detailed case studies of households that represent the latter classes. These case studies are descriptive in nature that presents everyday life and struggle of labourers for livelihood and dignity, intra- and inter-generational changes in forms of labour.

The sixth chapter deals with changing aspects related to agricultural labour and dependency relations in the village. It deals with mechanisation, emergence of small farms and household labour. The seventh chapter deals with the phenomenon of circulation of labour, its patterns and the extent of household dependence on migrant incomes. It further deals with the role of migration in household economy and possibilities of economic mobility. The final chapter highlights some important observations of the study and offers some conclusions.

## **Observations of the study**

The major conclusions of this study pertain to two broad interrelated areas, *viz.* agrarian and social change, with a focus on the changing conditions of labouring populations. These conclusions are drawn focusing on the phenomenon of labour circulation both in itself as well as its influence on social and agrarian changes. Further, certain important associated aspects are highlighted and presented in two sections.

Predominance of household labour supplemented by new technology: With increasing dispersal rather than concentration of land, cultivators of various landholding sizes increasingly manage cultivation with household labour and new technologies rather than hired labour. Small and marginal owners of land increasingly depend on wage work outside agriculture and this trend has been observed since the 1980s (Byres, 1981; Harriss, 1982). But a significant aspect of this development is that these small owner-cultivators too, increasingly employ machinery and other technologies to substitute labour (both household labour and hired labour) and engage in wage work outside agriculture, largely in the cities.

Unavailability of *regular* wage work had been one of the major reasons of outmigration of labouring households. Increasing migration of these households led to scarcity of agricultural labour during peak agricultural activities. In response to such a situation, the main landowning households substituted hired labour with technology, which later further displaced hired labour in agriculture. On the other hand, the majority of small and marginal owners of land increased their time in wage work away from the village and these incomes are used to employ technology and reduce household labour in own-cultivation. While mechanisation and other new labour replacing technologies reduced hired labour relative to household labour among the substantial land owning households, except during peak seasons. Small and marginal holding households increased mechanisation to reduce household labour in cultivation and spent more time labouring in the cities. In other words, mechanisation has been a strategic way out for different land size-class households to increase incomes in different ways. One, to substitute hired labour and while the other free themselves for wage work in the cities.

In a context of semi-arid/ 'backward' agriculture and unavailability of wage employment in the home village, labour outmigration has contributed to an increase of mechanisation and a decline in agricultural wage employment and paradoxically increase in agricultural wage rates in the recent years. The process of migration of households contributes not only to supplement the incomes from unviable small holdings of land, but also facilitates technology-intense cultivation that is financed by labouring away from the village. After intermittent failures, droughts and losses from failed borewells, cultivation is gradually restored by toiling in the cities.

Decline in dependency relationships and assertion by 'lower' castes: The material basis of 'dominance' i.e. land (Dumont, 1988/2009) that manifested as 'control' of labouring and land-poor households in the past has largely withered. There is no 'single caste' or families that have "effective control" of the village (Mendelsohn, 1993:806). On the one hand the decline in the size of landholdings with no substantial improvements in land productivity has resulted in downward economic mobility of the resident cultivating *reddy* caste families. And on the other, there has been a decline in dependence of labouring households on cultivator families as a result of the increased availability of migrant wage work.

Dependence on landowning *reddy* caste families for wage work as well as for loans has almost disappeared. There has been an increase in moneylending activity with increasing creditworthiness of circulating labour. But debt relations are now more commercial and disconnected with labour employment. The major source of loans for 'lower' caste families to meet everyday consumption or marriage expenses in the past was done by 'mortgaging' one's labour in the form of attached labour contracts (*jeetham*). The break from attached labour, has brought about significant qualitative change in the relations between the larger landowning and land-poor families and castes where particularly male labour avoids daily wage work with cultivators. The most important expression of assertion by men across castes, and especially by SC men, is in avoiding wage work in agriculture. Jodhka (2012:10) noted a similar trend in rural Haryana. "Working with farmers implied accepting their domination and power. By refusing to work on land, dalits expressed their dissent against the traditional structure of patron-client ties".

Despite these fundamental changes in land, caste and labour relations, there are spheres in which a few substantial landowning *reddy* caste families still wield considerable influence. A couple of *reddy* families are active in village electoral politics, but their influence draws not from land or cultivation but from their connections with local politicians, contracting of small public works and their ability to spend money during elections. There was one such *reddy* (a moneylender) who had been a *de facto* village *sarpanch* for two consecutive terms (before and during this field study), when the post was reserved for backward castes (Appendix-2). Such influence, however, does not go unchallenged. Almost every caste group has young male members who are active in village politics and also mediate between villagers and government officials in the sanction of house loans, pensions etc.

### **Agrarian Change**

The structure of landholding in the study village has drastically changed over the last 50 years or so. Inequality in ownership of land has reduced but is still significant. A couple of families held more than 250 acres of land three generations ago, and even till about 1990 at least five families had more than 50 acres of land. During the field study only three families held between 20 and 30 acres of land. About three-fourths of the owners of land held small and marginal holdings. This was a drastic change given that the average size of landholding in semi-arid regions is usually higher than in wet land regions.

There was not only fragmentation of land due to growth of population and inheritance divisions across sections but there was also transfer of land through sale mostly from erstwhile big landowning caste of *reddys* to the 'backward' castes, especially the OBCs. This became possible because of migrant incomes for many and through sheep rearing for the traditional shepherd caste. Yet, the OCs who constitute slightly less than 30% of the village households own about half of the village land. However, 40% of them own only small and marginal holdings. On the other extreme, SCs that constitute 30% of the households own 16% of the agricultural land, and nearly three-fourths of them own only marginal holdings.

Ownership of land, even for most of those with substantial lands, did not translate into economic mobility or a shift to new enterprising avenues because of the lack of productive development in rainfed agriculture. The state's neglect and bias against dryland agriculture has forced cultivators to shift to irrigated crops like paddy that received support from the State in irrigated regions.

Private investment in borewell irrigation technology had some promise initially but resulted in a groundwater crisis and losses of investment from the late 1990s. The increase in total extent of irrigation in the district by the 1990s due to groundwater irrigation has once again reduced to the levels that were at the beginning of the decade because of a steep reduction in tank and openwell sources. This study shows that there is significant disparity in access to groundwater irrigation (shown in Chapter-4). Furthermore, all the landowners under the command area of tank have been deprived of irrigation since the tank dried up from 1998-99 in the study village. The same trend is reflected in the district at large going by official statistics. Earlier, altogether 131 households had access to irrigation under the tank (apart from the openwells) in the village. But during the field study only 83 households had access to irrigation under borewells. This modern technology which was believed to be more equitable compared to the traditional technologies, has created greater disparity in access to irrigation compared to the disparity in landowning pattern.

The threshold of viability of the landholdings could not be reduced for a majority of the households due to limitations in irrigation and lack of significant technological improvements in rainfed agriculture. Households among the SCs and OBCs have been migrating for wage work since the 1960s but this trend increased from the 1980s when the wage work shifted to construction work in the cities. Fragmentation of land on the one hand and losses in borewells and unviability of rainfed cultivation has forced cultivator households from the *reddy* caste to migrate for wage work, which had not engaged in wage work earlier in the village. This trend has been a reverse mimesis by the 'upper' caste families adopting the 'lower' caste working lives since the mid 1990s.

About four-fifths of the households now engage in wage work inside and outside the village owning land ranging from about a quarter acre up to ten acres. Wage incomes

constitute a major part of household incomes for about three-fourths of the total households that own mostly below five acres of land. These households are neither wage labourers nor peasant cultivators, but are ‘classes of labour’ (Bernstien, 2010) – they neither own sufficient land nor are dispossessed of land.

### **Village, caste and ‘footloose’ labour**

Labour circulation between the village and the city is no longer a transient phenomenon anymore; nor is it only seasonal. The city is the place for work. Urban slums and construction sites are extended villages. These are households with dual hearths and residences. But urban spaces allow them only on the fringes and only till their bodies are strong. Therefore, these households continuously strive to secure housing and economic viability in the village. The only way out in the village is to improve cultivation. Lowering consumption and living costs, these working members use migrant remittances for agricultural inputs, repaying crop loans in banks and service debt incurred for house construction, borewells etc.

The scale of migration for wage work has been increasing. The duration of stay away from the village for wage work also has been increasing. 66% of households during the field survey had one or more or all household members employed away from the village in casual work mostly in construction. Around half of the remaining households had migrant members in previous years. About half of the OC households and nearly four-fifths of the SC households had migrants.

Contrary to the assumptions, MGNREGA did not reduce labour migration. Given the long-term plans of households and availability of regular wage work in urban construction, MGNREGA is not considered a preferred option by these households. A few who stayed back for various reasons availed MGNREGA work, of which a few households availed more than a 100 person-days of work. Large-scale migration on the one hand and MGNREGA on the other have contributed to a threefold increase in agricultural wage rates (nominal wages) for both men and women within five years of implementation of the Act. This increase is paradoxical as it is accompanied by a decline in the availability of wage work in agriculture due to employment of machinery in tilling

land and harvesting. Further, the use of herbicides in recent years has been replacing hired labour even in weeding activity, which was labour intensive.

Debt-bondage and unfree labour relations had been an area of concern and debate since long both in agriculture and non-farm sectors in India. The *bhagela* or *jeetham* system was prevalent in this region since pre-Independence times, which was similar to *jita*, *pannaiyal*, *padial*, *kamia*, *hali* etc that occurred in other parts of the country. Although all such forms were abolished in India since 1976, attached labour continued, although reducing, till the 1990s. This form has almost disappeared in the village and the major contributing factor for this has been the option of migrant wage work. Initially, labourers entered bonded contracts to break away from bondage in the village. Later on, the present generation of workers shifted to daily wage work in the cities.

The, preference for migrant workers over locals has been considered as employers' strategy to ensure cheap and docile labour (Breman, 1996). But, it is observed in this study that it is also the labourers' conscious strategy to avoid local employers, instead they prefer non-local employers. Such avoidance/preference is observed both in the village and in the cities. Working away from the village manifests in avoidance of work for others within the village and assertion of independence. Further, the employers and *mestris* from the same village or region are consciously avoided in the cities. Labourers prefer to work under those whose social, regional and linguistic identity is distant. The attempt is not to submit to anyone in the village where their dignity is at stake, and to those individuals and groups that are from similar social hierarchy in the cities and work places as that of village. Thus, spatial mobility of labouring households assumes meanings in the context of social relations in the home village that go beyond economic considerations.

One of significant aspect of migration in this region is the higher participation of women in migrant wage work compared to north Indian states. Women in the study village constitute 44% of migrant wage workers. There is no significant variation in mobility in terms of gender across castes. They are proportionately as mobile as men in their respective castes. But work opportunities are limited for women in non-farm sectors. They are restricted to the lowest and most menial work in construction. The 'skilled'

work in construction is highly gendered and excludes women. The expanding large-scale construction projects that employ new technologies exclude women more than men and compared to small and medium scale constructions. However, migrant women across castes are into wage work in construction.

There is a possibility for acquisition of skills within and outside construction work in the cities for young men. Young men consider work in the cities as their natural destination and not agricultural work. Some of the second-generation migrant workers from the SCs and OBCs have acquired skills within construction. Some of them are specialised in bricklaying, flooring, plumbing, painting and other construction-related works. They receive higher wages compared to 'unskilled' workers. While the majority of OCs who are first-generation wage workers in the cities and in construction are restricted to low paid unskilled work. A few of them with little education, find service sector jobs as sales boys which pay less compared to manual wage work in construction.

One of significant outcome of the long experience of SCs and OBCs in migrant wage work in the cities is that they are more advantaged in terms of skills and wages within sectors that involves manual work and that offer casual wage work like construction. This conforms to the larger trends of segmentation within casual wage employment in terms of wages. OBCs and SCs also to an extent receive on average higher wages in urban India. Caste-related specialisations, acquisition of new skills due to long-term experience in migration and their segmentation within manual work seem to explain this trend.

Caste-specific traditional services have declined. Only a few families from the washermen caste still practice their traditional occupation. But it is reproduced more in urban areas than in the village. By and large the majority of households across all caste groups in the village are into similar manual work either in own cultivation or agricultural wage work or in construction in cities. The 'classes of labour' is a phenomenon across all caste groups. But the 'cultivator/farmer' class and the 'rentier' class, which comprise a few households in the village, are exclusively from the *reddy* caste.

The changing labour relations and agrarian change facilitated and reinforced by labour circulation in a semi-arid region of India, does find resonance in the larger changes

observed in Indian agrarian relations. The persistence of small farms and the sustained back-and-forth movement to urban centres for wage are today realities in several regions of India. The observations of the study presented in brief in this concluding chapter do warrant sustained and closer analysis. An understanding of these micro-level negotiations by labouring populations will enhance academic debate.

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