Chapter 5: Child migration and child schooling

Migrants from Jalpara include many children. Along with extent and motives this chapter explores how the education of children is affected by such migration. To understand the extent of child migration I take the help of the dataset collected for the census and 35 sampled households in 2008, where a question was asked whether any member in the family had experience of migration. If there was a child having experience of migration, questions were asked to investigate its motives, and impact on education. The life histories were also very useful to understand these aspects more deeply.

This chapter starts with the discussion on the extent of child migration including their historical background. Then it moves to the section that helps to understand the motives of child migration. This is followed by the section, which takes into account the discussion of the impact of such migration on education of children.

The extent of child migration

The child migration from Jalpara is quite old. The life history of Azad Sheikh, who was 67 years old at the time of interview in 2006, told that he had migrated for work when he was 14 or 15 years old. This means that child migration was there even before 50 years from now. The other life histories along with information from sampled households suggest that the flow of such migration was still there at present.
In November 2008, 6.8 percent of all households had at least a child, who migrated for work. The proportion of such household was little higher (8.6 percent) in sampled households. This is perhaps because many households in the census did not have any children whereas having children was one of the preconditions of selection of a household as a sample.

**Pattern of child migration**

Mohammad Mahasin, formerly a high school teacher and the existing Chairman to the District Primary School Council, claimed that many children migrated out for work from his area, which included the study village. He has seen children of even 12 years age to migrate out as labours. He has seen many children to drop out of school even after admission in class 5 in high school.

The picture of Jalpara too is similar to that area. Even by the age of 13 years Abbas migrated and worked in three trips. As the table (below) suggests children tended to start migration at the age of 14 or 15. The life histories suggest that only around that age children can acquire the skills and confidence to work as a complete labour. This reveals from the following life history.

When I was around seven or eight, I started to work. I used to feed cows and shepherd them. Each household used to have 14 or 15 cows. Not so many goats, may be between five and seven. There are no sheep around nowadays, but there used to be then. The owners would look for young children early in the morning and would come back home after eating at six, seven or eight in the evening. I would get my meals and Rs 5 as my wage every month. I did
shepherding for two to three years. I gradually learnt to do other jobs. Ploughing and so on. I was around 14 or 15 then. My wage was Rs 20 a month. Money and food. Nothing else. I used to plough, look after the land, but also do all the farm works, including harvesting rice and jute, feeding the cows and so on. Everything. Then I went to bidesh to work.

Evidence of migration of children at younger age was also available. But they did not migrate to seek any employment. For example, as the life history of Mobin Sheikh suggests, he along with his younger siblings migrated with his mother when he was very small – even not of the age to start his schooling. His mother migrated for begging when she was abandoned by her husband. Similar thing happened with Rakib Sheikh migrated out when he was studying in class 3, which indicates that he was merely of the age of 8 years when migrated. His mother also migrated out when abandoned by her husband. Such migration of Mobin and Rakib was about 30 and 20 years old respectively. In the year 2005 there was an instance of migration of such young child and it was the son of Mobin Sheikh. In this case there took place the family migration for work. At the time of fieldwork Lalon, who was about 11 years old, was found to migrate out with his mother, who worked in Mumbai. Lalon stayed part of the year with his mother and other part in Jalpara.

Migration of younger children occurred only when their mothers migrated. Since the volume of women migration from Jalpara was quite small, and they are more common among such group of women who had very little possibility of having children of school going age because of their old age, the migration of very young children from Jalpara was not much common.
Though people from Jalpara migrate for several activities such as trading, begging, working in the brickfield, the migration for wage work was more prevalent. The migration of children was limited to wage work only, but not for brickfield. At the time of fieldwork in 1999-2000, the wage work migration was mostly limited to agriculture only, and that’s why migration of children was also limited to that sector, and it was more common for winter rice harvest. In the year 2005 the migration for non-agricultural work such as construction of roads and buildings in towns and cities, or similar work was quite common in the year 2005. Now children of Jalpara were found to migrate for both the agricultural and non-agricultural wage work though the migration towards towns seemed to be more common among them.

Though most of the adults formed group before leaving for migration, some were found to migrate alone and formed group on the way or not at all. But none of the children were found to migrate alone. Their groups either included some relatives like father and brothers or formed with the members mostly of their age group. However, the younger children tend to migrate with their relatives. Every times Abbas, a 13 years old child, migrated with his father, who, in the destination, helps him so that he can complete the amount of work he was supposed to do.

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14 Winter rice harvest is relatively easier than other season particularly because of the type of work which is mainly cutting, binding and threshing; weather, which is not too cold or hot; and the length of day, which is shorter compared to other seasons. The works tend to start at around sunrise and end at around sunset.
Table 5.1: Age and education at the time of first migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of head of migrant family</th>
<th>Education (standard completed)</th>
<th>Age at first migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Badsha Ali (30)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>When I first went to bidesh, I was about fourteen or fifteen. All my friends were going, so went along with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anwar Sheikh (45)</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>I have been working in bidesh since the age of about fifteen. [it was with a group of 27 including his father]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabir Mia (21) Student of BA</td>
<td>I have been to bidesh a few times to work. The first time, I started to work as a mason’s assistant…..That year I was studying in school, in class 9.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobin Sheikh (36)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>When I was in class 6, I changed a lot. I became naughty and left school. My elder brother tried many times to send me back but I refused to go. So he got angry and took me to harvest winter paddy in bidesh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monirul Sheikh Illiterate</td>
<td>When I first went to work in bidesh I was a naughty young lad of 19.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sajed Sheikh (42) Illiterate</td>
<td>The first time I went was to the village of Radhanagar, in the district of Barddhaman. I was about 20 years old.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsed Sheikh (mid forty) Illiterate</td>
<td>When I turned 14 or 15…..I left them [the employer with whom he worked for a couple of years] to start working as a wage labourer……..I have been going to bidesh since when I started working as a labourer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azad Sheikh (67) Illiterate</td>
<td>When I was around seven or eight, I started to work….I did shepherding for two to three years. I gradually learnt to do other jobs – ploughing and so on. I was around 14 or 15 then….Then I went to bidesh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like adults, children can make several trips of migration in a year. They can also make only a single trip during his childhood. The driving forces can be different for different child or different trips for a particular child. To discuss this at first we shall take into account the first

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Migration Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rakib Sheikh</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>When my father left [us]…we were very young. Who would feed us? My mother decided that she’d raise us…..and started begging. She took me with her to Galsi…In times of need, I’ve gone to bidesh to work. The first time I went, I was 18 years old. I went on my own, because of my family’s need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamidul Sheikh</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>The first time I went to work in bidesh……I was about 15 years old….My parents asked me to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajinul Sah</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>I was 20 years old when I first went to bidesh to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobu Sheikh</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>The first time I went, I was around 17 or 18 years old. My family was in a crisis….I went on my own accord, with a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piyar Sheikh</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>When I first went, I was about 18 years old. No one told me to go, but the difficulties in my family forced me to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : Fieldwork data
trips of different children and then we shall move to the discussion that takes into account the multiple trips of a single child.

The primary objective of migration of some children was to help their families to overcome the economic crisis. At the time of first migration of Sabir Mia the reason was to bring some money so that it would help them to get back their land that was mortgaged to collect money for marriage of his sister. At the age of 16 Mansur started migration because he knew that his father, Mobin Sheikh, was fighting hard to maintain their family. On top of that they needed to save money for the marriage of his sister. Similarly, when Hamidul Sheikh was about 15 years old his parents asked him to migrate out because they were facing difficulties to maintain their family with the earning from begging.

Some children migrated perhaps because this allowed them to acquire some economic freedom. In such cases the children kept at least a part of their earnings with themselves and spent it on their own ways. In the year 2005 Asif migrated to Kolkata and earned Rs 400 in a trip. Out of that he gave Rs 200 to his parents and he kept the rest with himself. Children spent this money in various ways. Among the common practices, on which they earn this money, there were gambling, tea, biris and cigarettes. Perhaps that’s why, when the children return, particularly around the seasons of Eids, the crowd in the tea stalls in the village, and gambling, by way of playing cards here and there in the village from late afternoon, gets increased.
In some trips children migrated solely for their own purposes. That’s why they don’t give the
money, earned from *bidesh*, to their family at all. Hafiz migrates but, as his father claimed,
he never gives his earnings to his parents. Once Mobin migrated because he wanted to buy a
wristwatch for himself. There were some evidences supporting that children migrated for the
benefit of their own education (see the section below). Migration was also a way of
punishment to send back children to school (see the section below).

Evidences were there where children migrated with the hope that they could enjoy the new
places. Finishing his education in primary school, which was only upto class 4, Abbas Ali
started to migrate out. His parents tried hard to send him to school but he did not like it. With
annoyance his mother reported that he said, “If I study, I could not go to Delhi, Mumbai or
Kolkata.”

Usually there was a plan, prior to a trip of migration, of what the money would be spent on.
This indicates that for a single child the cause of migration may change over time. Once of
Sabir Mia migrated because they needed some money to get back their land that was
mortgaged to collect money for marriage of his sister. Another time he migrated because he
wanted to buy a bicycle. In the year 2005 he migrated for rice transplantation because, as he
claimed, “I knew I would need money to pay for my admission [in higher class]. I would also
need to buy some books.” Similarly, the cause behind first migration of Mobin Sheikh was
his punishment. Next time he migrated in huff, with the hope that he could buy a wristwatch
with the earnings from migration.
The impact of child migration on child education.

In relation to schooling and migration children of Jalpara can be presented in the following way

Figure 5.1: Categories of children in Jalpara with relation to their migration and schooling status

The chart given above shows that part of both in-school and out of school children migrate out. The following paragraphs would discuss how the child migration affected the education of children. We would begin with the discussion on migration of children who were also studying in-school. This will be followed by paragraphs that focus migration of out of school children.

Migration of in-school children

None of these children were studying in primary level of schooling. All such children were boys. Sometimes the migrants intended to benefit their own education. Let us take an example. Idrish Sheikh comes from a poor family. He had a brother and a sister, both being younger to him. His father, who was a petty trader, would fight hard to maintain his family as
well as to meet the cost of education of three of them. He thought his father might not be able
to buy his book for his new class. So finishing his final examination of Class-8 he migrated
out in the hope that he would buy books for new class with the money earned from bidesh.
By this decision on the one way he did not miss any school days since school remained
closed for student for some days after final examination. On the other hand during this
vacation he could make some money that could be used productively for his study.

But students are not always fortunate to do so. Sabir Mia’s family was little better off
compared to the family of Idrish. They had some cultivable land and his father also had petty
trade. But the situation was different for them. They had to mortgage part of that land to raise
money for marriage of his sister. They did not have enough savings so that they can recover
their land, which is very important for earning livelihood of a family like theirs. So Sabir Mia
was asked by his mother to migrate out when he had a month long vacation on the occasion
of Durga Puja. Sabir Mia was studying in Class-9. He migrated out and worked for 52 days
in bidesh. This meant he did not gain anything from this migration as a benefit to his
education. Rather he lost some days of school that weakened him in his study.

Though children intended to make use of migration for the benefit of their education this
hope did not materialize for some children. Musa comes from a poor family that had his
parents, grandma and four younger siblings. His father was landless labour. Musa was the
eldest child and he was going to appear at Madhamik Pariksha, the first public examination
that is held at the end of Class-10. Because of his eye problems he was facing difficulties in
reading his books. To his father, such problem was not as urgent as to see a doctor
immediately. So Musa decided to migrate out to raise some money for the treatment of his eyes. Whereas the Madhyamik examination was in the month of February he migrated in the month of November. He returned home in fifteen days when he found that he had earned money enough for the treatment. But at home he found that his mother was seriously ill. Urgently she needed to be taken to doctor. So instead of seeing doctor for himself he spent all of his money for the treatment of his mother.

Whereas migration is a source to benefit their education, it may also push them towards dropping out. Jamal lived with his parents, two brothers and a sister. His father was a petty trader and elder brother would migrate for various activities. He was not in the situation as hard as in the cases stated above. But when he was a student of Class-8 he started to lose interest in his education and started migration. Gradually, he became more disinterested in education and interested in migration. Consequently, he left school while he was studying in Class-8.

Migration can be used as a strategy to push back children to school, particularly when they take step to leave it. In Jalpara, there were several instances where children lost interest in their education because of bad company. One such instance was Mobin Sheikh.

When I was in class 6, I changed a lot. I became naughty and left school. My elder brother tried hard to send me back but I refused to go. So he got angry and took me to harvest winter paddy in bidesh. We were working for two separate landowners. After a few days I got a bad stomach. I had to run off to defecate very frequently. The landowner’s son complained to his father about it saying that I was not doing any work. In the meantime a person from my
group went and told my brother about my situation, and he said, ‘Let him die’. The person who’d told him about me then tried to convince him by saying, ‘If your younger brother dies, what will you do? Will you be able to take your dead brother home?’ So my brother came to me and said, ‘If you are willing to study, go back home and start going to school again.’ I had earned around Rs 140 and he gave me another Rs 100. So I came back with Rs 240. I was admitted to class 6 again and started to study well.

Migration of out of school children

As stated elsewhere before, many children in Jalpara left study while they were studying in High School. Many of these children migrated out for work. There were very few cases where a single family had both migrant and school going children. Three out of 35 households were found where a child below 18 years of age migrated whereas some others were continuing their education.

When Aoal or Monirul, 15 and 16 years old respectively, completed their study in primary school and needed money for admission in high school, their families could not provide it. Consequently they had to leave their own study. But when sisters of both of them completed primary school and needed money to get admission in high school they were able to do so. The money earned by Aoal and Monirul from bidesh was useful in this regard.

There were many who left their study for some reasons when they were children of below 18 years. By the time of fieldwork they had attained their adulthood. But their migration during childhood helped them to acquire some skills that enable them to make higher amount of earning. When they stayed at home either they roamed around or hired out labour. But there
was very limited opportunity to earn much from the local labour market. Like adults, migration had better opportunity to earn for children. Thus their migration was likely to increase their family income and therefore reduce the economic constraints, which often limit the educational access. Therefore, there is some possibility that migration of such children would facilitate the access to education of children who are left behind – directly or indirectly. For example, migration of Aoal, as stated before, helped admission of his sister in school. When Aoal himself completed his study in primary school he did not have money to get admission in high school. But when the same thing repeated for his sister.