Chapter 6: Migration, gender and child education

The analysis of data informs that the impact could be classified under two broad headings; the gender of the migrant people, and the gender of those who are staying behind in the source area.

The gender of the migrant

It appears from the data, when gender is considered, the impact may be in two ways.

- Women migration, and
- Male migration

The impact of women migration

From a research that aimed to find the impact of migration on the children left behind, conducted among 709 children in Philippines, Battistella and Conaco (1998) came to the conclusion that the mothers’ absence has the most disruptive effect in the life of children including their education. The role of mothers is more important than father for the education of their children (ibid). The importance is likely to be greater in the context where the mothers have the prime responsibility of care-giving to the children.

Though women migration from Jalpara is very few still the limited number of such migration tends to conform the conclusion of Battistella and Conaco (1998). Out of 35 sampled households there were only two from where women migrated leaving children. These women did not have their husband in the families because one (Golchehara Bewa) of them was
widowed and the other one (Modira Bibi) was abandoned by her husband. While Golchehara Bewa, who had a boy and a girl of school going age, was found to migrate for begging that involved absence from home for around ten day a trip and the other one reportedly for domestic work in distant Mumbai, a mega city that is more than 1500 kilometres away from Jalpara and that involves mothers’ absence for a couple of months a trip. When returns home Modira Bibi stayed at home hardly a month. Both of these women were highly dependent on their relatives. When migrate they leave their children in the custody of their relatives. However the responsibility of the relatives varied. While Golchehara’s daughter cooked for themselves Modira Bibi’s son was found to eat with his uncle.

From Jalpara women migrants were mainly those who were poor as well as widowed, abandoned or divorced by their husbands. Such kinds of women from well off families or the families that had source of ensured support from their relatives such as sons or others were not found to migrate for earning activities. Therefore, whereas in the families with husband and wife one of them can take care of the children in absence of the other, in families where husband is permanently absent there is possibility of less supervision on the children in the families. Arguably, it is expected that there would be no exception of it in case of the children’s education although capability to do so may vary from women to women.

In Jalpara women migration for employment is relatively a new phenomenon and it, however, has an increasing trend over time. It came out from the observation that although the labour market for women in Jalpara is limited to mostly within the household complex, partly because of conservativeness owing to the social ideology about the nature of work that
women may perform, it gradually expands to include agricultural activities and other works not only available within the source areas but also in distant urban and rural areas. Although at the time of study in Jalpara the share of women migrants was significantly low – only two out of 35 sampled households - still there appears some suggestive impacts of women migration on child education.

It has already been stated earlier that women migration took place from the families where there was no husband to share the family responsibility. So when women, with whom young children of school going age live, migrate for certain period nobody was there with the children to compensate the mother’s place, particularly when it was nuclear family. The children largely become on their own. According to observation the extended families took some degree of charges of these children mostly related to their safety and security, which was largely part of social tradition. However, it appeared from the fieldwork data that lack of mothers’ presence at home significantly affects the children’s education and this too might vary depending on the length of absence. This reveals from the following discussion.

The observation suggests that the absence of mother may keep some school age children out of school. Many children of school going age in Jalpara were found to remain out of school irrespective of economic or migration status of the families from where they come out. They were both from double parents and single parent (having mother only) family including the households from where mothers migrate. But there was more propensity of being out of school for those children, who come from the single parent (mother only) families, which were involved with migration. In the two sampled households having mothers as migrant
there were three children. One of them was not at all enrolled whereas other two stopped schooling. Both of these dropout children were from the same family and although one of these children claimed poverty to be the reason of drop out the other one did not have such reasons. Whereas the older one had completed the primary school and needed some money to get admission in higher school the younger one was yet to complete the primary school that provided free books and charged no fees. This may be due to the lack of supervision where, according to local schoolteacher, guardian’s role is important for the schooling of their children. But this role is likely to be weaker when parents are absent from home.

It also appeared from the observation that there may be a positive relation between the length of absence and the propensity of children remaining out of school. Children from the family having women migrant of short duration, which is often around a week or two, had greater possibility to be in school than that from the family with women migrant of longer duration, often more than six months. In case of short duration migration the migrants were found to stay at home a big chunk of time, often the major part. This may enable the migrants to make sure the enrolment of their children in school. But in case of long duration migration the migrant mother was less able to supervise her child. The mother stayed at home in Jalpara only for a short duration, for a couple of weeks a year. Her stay did not match with the period of enrolment in school (the schools enroll children only for a short span of time during the beginning of session) and therefore, increasing the possibility of children remaining unregistered in school. In addition, sometimes the mother kept her child with herself in the work destination. That also was found to contribute to the possibility of this child to remain out of school because sometimes at the time of admission the child stayed with his mother in
the work destination and therefore, this led him to miss the opportunity to be enrolled in Jalpara. On the other hand since he was not supposed to stay long in the destination no initiative was taken to make him admitted in the school in work destination.

**The impact of male migration**

Unlike women migration the migration of male members from the families may cause less crisis in terms of parental care related to child education. In Jalpara the men, who were involved with migration, always had at least their wives at home. However, they were not equally able to support their children in their education partly because some were more interested about their child education than the others Yet, it is likely that there is guarantee of care of the children to a degree much better than those families from where women migrate. In addition, male migrants were not necessarily the fathers. In many cases the male migrants include children of eligible age in the family. Therefore, in many cases both the parents stay with their children eligible to participate in schooling.

The male migration can be seen in three ways; when the migrants themselves are associated with schooling, when they are not involved in schooling, and when it is father. And the impact may be at the household level and/or at the locality level as a whole. Since generally women do not do the outdoor work male migration may create labour shortage both at the household level and at the locality level. This was found to make an influence on other children who are staying at home to work as a substitute to those who have migrated (see more in the section the gender of the stay puts). In this section I would like to limit the discussion to the dynamics other than the labour shortage.
Schoolboy migrants

The student migrants refer to those who are continuing their studies in the source locality but some times migrate for a certain period. This migration occurred in poor families and may be for agricultural activities in other rural areas or construction work in the urban places. Sometimes this migration is to get out of the negative influence of poverty on education. For an instance Gora says ‘oita na hole to chalbe na. Parasuna ta hole bandho kore dite hobe (it would not go without that. Otherwise I have to stop my education)’. This was because Gora comes from a landless poor family and he has to meet his own cost including the cost of education.

Students in the government schools in West Bengal do not have to pay any tuition fees to schools. But they have to bear other costs associated with education. For example there are the costs of private tuition, books, stationery, transportation, uniform, footwear, pocket-money etc. Not all were equally important to every student. Rather many of them are more important to those who were studying in upper primary onward than those in lower primary. But the inclination of taking private tuition was found to be universal mainly because the quality of education in government schools is believed to be very poor and this reveals from the words of a mother of a school child ‘Schoole ar katota para hai, privatei para hai (how much does the learning takes place in school? Rather it happens only in private tuition)’. Perhaps that’s why there is a general tendency among the children to take private tuition. Although this implies private tuition to be crucial for schooling, many of them cannot afford it. This may lead many to drop out of school. For instance, to say about the reason of drop out of school of her child a mother told ‘jhetu amra garib, privater taka jogar korte parlam
Many of such student migrants try to match their migration with the school vacation. But often they cannot match it partly because of opportunity to get access to the labour market and partly because of the seasonality, in case of migration for agricultural work. This was found to lead them to miss their school for certain period. They miss not only school but also private tuition, the main source of learning (for many). Therefore, although in one way migration helps such students to continue their education by reducing financial burden from their parents they have to compromise with certain degree of negative effect of migration such as missing school or private tuition. Nonetheless, as a whole this becomes beneficial for many for it is the migration of short duration and it is possible to be recovered without much difficulty. But because of gendered nature of migration only boys can avail this opportunity although not necessarily all the boys.

Making migration benefit to their education may not be possible to all the children. This may depend on family structure and their economic condition. It was observed in Jalpara that school-child migration from families with better economic condition is more likely to make use of this benefit. At the same time it was observed that within the poor households there was a positive relation between economic condition and the number of earning member in a family. That is, more the earning members at home better the economic condition of the family. This means families with less earning member tend to be poorer among the poor and
children from those families are less likely to make use of this migration opportunity. This would be clear from the following examples.

Gora had his brother and father as earning members in his family of six. They were landless poor but the earnings of two made them able to lease in some cultivable land to grow some crop providing them security of food stock for a large part of the year. This economic condition did not demand much from Gora, directly or indirectly, to contribute to the family income. But Monirul was unfortunate in this sense. He was in his early teenage and felt that the only income of his father is unable to meet the cost of his five-member family where the cost includes his younger siblings’ education, marriage of his sister and the immediate medical treatment of his mother. So leaving his study he migrated in the hope to contribute to his family income and thereby to reduce the intensity of poverty in the family. For him, the opportunity of migration opened up the door of dropping out of school.

Furthermore, this opportunity may open up the door of dropping out for some other children, who are not much interested in continuing education rather keen to enjoy world in the mega cities as early as possible in their life. For instance Abbas, a 13-year-old boy left his study after class 4 and started migration to see the outer world. Already he had migrated for three times. His mother was not at all happy at this decision of discontinuation of education and to say the reason of discontinuation quoting her son she said, ‘[se mone kore] jodi parasuna kori tahole Dilli, Bombay, Kolkata jete parbo na ([he thinks] if I continue the study then I wouldn’t be able to go to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata etc.)’
When the migrant is other than schoolboy or father

There were many children in Jalpara who had left their study quite a couple of years before their migration. It was almost universally found that remittances from their migration improved the affordability of the families to their children’s education irrespective of gender. For an instance, Mujid, who appeared at the Madhyamik examination (secondary level public examination) believed that ‘*age kasto hoto, [baba taka paisa dite parto na] ekhon bhai bidesh jai. Tate ektu subidha hayechhe* (previously we had hardship [father was unable to pay the cost of education]. Now brother migrates. That has improved the situation)’. In another instance Hasibul studied in class 9 and needed about Rs1000 to purchase his required books and meet other related expenses. His was not able to afford so much money at that time. Remittances from his brother’s migration made him able to meet his need more on time. It is established by researches that lack of affordability is one of the causes of drop out from schools (PROBE team 1999). Therefore, unless there was the opportunity of such migration probably many other children would have been added to the current number of out of school children or their education would have been affected differently. However, this opportunity was limited only to those households that had eligible male members.

It was also observed that there was relation between regular payment of private tuition fee and regularity in its attendance. Many children felt shy to attend private tuition if the fee was due to pay. Perhaps girls were shyer. This is expressed from the words of a mother of a girl, ‘*Meye, tai besi lajja lage (taka baki parle). Tai mas pujlei barite ma-babar kachhe taka chai (private) master-ke debar janya.* [They are girls and that’s why they feel more ashamed (if their fee remains due). So, immediately after a month becomes complete they want money
from parents to pay the fees to their (private) tutor’. Therefore, it seems that the girls’ education is likely to be more benefited out of such migration.

Differential benefits may also be noticed when workload at home is taken into consideration. According to the tradition of Jalpara there is clear labour division between genders. Distance of the place of work was the main decisive factors. Often closer the distance from home greater the female work participation or vice versa. In addition, all the male members join hands with a particular work meant to them. Female members also do in the same way. So when some males remain absent their workload shifts to the shoulder of male members who stayed at home. This may also depend on the age of the children (this is discussed later in this paper).

When father migrates

\textit{Baap na thakle meyera ma-ke bhai kam kare. Marle-o kichhu mone kare na, amra meye-chhele na?} [If father is absent from home the girls care less to their mother. They do not care even if they are beaten up. We are women, isn’t it?]

- a mother about her daughters.

The above words of a mother indicate the importance of the presence of fathers of children to make them disciplined. It also reveals the gender ideology of disciplining children that. The woman saw herself that by default women were not to discipline children. Therefore, just the presence of fathers makes a sensible difference. But this was not true for all. Mothers of 15 per cent of children among the interviewed in Jalpara told that it was father whom the
children obey more. By gender they were of equal number and the age group of those children is scattered. That means they are composed of entire age range – six to eighteen years. It appeared from the data that fathers of some of such children make them to sit with their lesson at home or to go to school regularly. Many fathers were found to be indifferent about taking care of their children’s education by making them going to school or sitting with their lesson at home whereas many others, although interested, did not find enough time to do so.

Although majority of children (57 per cent) was found to report that they obey their mothers the most. Among the girls it was 65 per cent and the boys it was 65 per cent who care mothers the most. This caring was not necessarily with regard to education but it was in general obeying. Some of these mothers ask their children in the morning and in the evening to sit with their lesson. Sometimes children do it to show up and satisfy the mothers but sometimes they don’t care at all to do this. This was partly because children do not find interest in sitting with lesson due to their low level of learning achievement, which was because of poor teaching in school.

A significant proportion of children (19 per cent) were found to report that they obey none and they were in the age range between 12 and 8 years. Out of seven such children there were five girls and two boys]. According to observation they were fonder of roaming around. Some of them were also found to be involved in looking after cattle, own cultivation (if any)
and so on and it seemed that they enjoyed these activities more than the educational activities.

Absence of father may mean more than that of making the children undisciplined. According to observation this may mean the increase of workload (discussed in the next section), the risk bearing factors and so on. Absence of husband may cause mental disturbances to some wives leading to some health problem. This problem was found to make some girls to miss their schools because many of the workloads shift to their shoulders from their mothers. This was found to happen mostly on grown up girls but in some cases the younger girls were not exception. The girls also tend to miss school when their mother needed to visit relatives in some ceremonial occasion that could be attended husbands instead of wives if husbands were at home. In addition, during the absence of the main breadwinner the family may be in need of lump sum amount of money for various reasons including the children’s education to admit them in school, which need some fees to be paid. Whereas some women were found to be able to get hold of required amount of money by incurring loan or by other means, many others don’t. Absence of husbands from those families where wives are not able to have the access to such loan may affect children’s education negatively. For example, they may fail to admit their children in school or children may stop going to private tuition being shy of not being able to pay their fees timely.

When husbands migrate there is tendency of the wives of younger ages to stay with their parents, who may be in the same village or in the other village. If the village is different the
school of the children of these families often becomes farther. This made some children less
interested to attend school and consequently there was tendency to miss school frequently.

**The gender and the workload on the stay behind.**

The previous section discusses that out migration of family members largely improve the
affordability of child education through the remittances brought home. This section discusses
the other sides of the impact appeared in the research. This may be related mainly to
workload in the origin. The workload was found to be not only at home but also in the area as
a whole.

Sometimes due to out migration of labourers there appeared labour crisis in Jalpara. This
crisis sometimes placed the local employers in hard situation. The demand is much higher
than the supply of labourers. In this situation many school going children were found to take
part in the local labour market, at their own decision, leading to affecting their education.
Some children were found to work in the morning, instead of preparing their lesson at home,
and then go to the school. The earning in this way was often used at their own discretion.
Ages of such children were from 11 years. Sometimes this was spent for their own education
whereas some other times for other purpose such as pocket money. According to key
informants’ interviews some of such children used this money for gambling too.

The children who hired out labour in the local labour market were mostly from the poor
households but not always from the households involved in migration. Even only a portion of
children from the four households involved in migration were doing such job. The gender bias was also noticed in such work participation. No girl was found to be influenced by such labour crisis in the local labour market. Only the boys were found to do such kinds of work. The work included cutting and carrying of paddy, and weeding of jute field. Age of these boys was also found to be a decisive factor. These children were mostly of more than ten years of age.

However, both boys and girls had different levels of importance in the performance of activities at the household level during the absence of more than one or more members. The households involved with migration were mostly asset-poor. However, they were not equally poor. Whereas many of them had their own cultivation - either in own land or in leased in land – many had their cattle. Often they were not mutually exclusive. Since access to some amount of land ensures better possibility of food stock for a certain period many of the poor were found to try for this. Therefore, those who do not have own land try to lease in some land. The popular tenancy in the locality was ‘reehen’ for which the tenant had to pay certain amount money for a certain area of land for a particular period, often one year. The poor often did not have lump sum amount of money to pay for this. They would borrow some money from relatives or moneylenders. The borrowings from relatives were often free of any interest whereas in other case there was interest mostly at the rate of three per cent per month. Whereas relatives did not demand for any security/mortgage, the moneylenders always demanded some mortgage, which was often gold jewellery. So there was the urge of getting back the jewellery home or repaying the loan from relatives to maintain the smooth relation. This situation, on the one hand, pushed the adult members to migrate out leading to
labour shortage at home. On the other hand the cultivation on this land pulled the members at home including the school going children to be involved in land based activities, which often made many children to miss their school. Younger the children more the possibility to be exempted from such activities. Since in Jalpara the field-based activities were mostly done by males the girls’ education was not affected negatively as much as in the case of boys due to such involvement.

The girls were mainly found to work at the close vicinity of household area. However, many girls were found, particularly where there was no boy in the family, who took care of their cattle. They mow grass, tend them in the field, bring them back home and feed them there. Although they do such jobs even during the presence of their father but at that time the load of such work becomes less because they also share some responsibilities related to this.