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Contrasts in Development in Bihar**

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I. TWO BIHAR VILLAGES

In the early 1980s, a research project was carried out on the dynamics of poverty and employment in Bihar. That project collected information on patterns of development and levels of living in a representative sample of 36 villages from different regions of the State. Since that date, several further studies have been carried out in the same villages.¹ The present paper concerns two of these villages, chosen to reflect differing development situations. Chandkura, a village in Nalanda district, was selected from a relatively advanced region near to the State capital, Patna; in the 1981 study it was described as a relatively prosperous village of medium peasants typical of South Bihar. Mahisham (sometimes known as Mahisan²), a village in Madhubani district, was selected from a relatively underdeveloped region in the north of the State; in 1981 it was described as a backward village typical of North Bihar. This paper investigates the changes that have occurred over the last 30 years in these two villages and how they have affected the lives and livelihoods of the populations concerned. In particular, it tries to pinpoint similarities and divergences in the development paths of these villages, and to understand the reasons.

Choosing two villages in this way permitted us to explore patterns of development in more depth than is possible from conventional survey analysis. In reality, each village has its own pattern of connections with the process of development, because of its location, resources, economic structure, social composition and relations, and history. The overall pattern of change in rural Bihar is then a composite of many different village development paths, in which the average may hide a great deal of variation in social and economic patterns and trends. We chose two villages, based on the observation that there are large differences between them, in order to illustrate some of the diversity in village development paths. Clearly there are more than two patterns, so this method could certainly be extended to a wider range of situations. The underlying goal is to identify the key economic and social mechanisms responsible for the pattern of growth and the distribution of its benefits.

There are three key methodological features of this work. The first is the comparative method –comparing different experiences in order to explore the role of different factors and forces. The second is historical and longitudinal. Because the villages have been studied over long periods, we are able to trace developments over time and use this both to build explanations, and to examine the trajectories of individuals and households within the broader development process. And third, we bring together different sources of information: village level surveys providing information on social and economic structures and facilities; sample

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surveys of households within each village; and a number of in-depth family histories that fill out details and perceptions, and identify important factors of change. We therefore bring together quantitative and qualitative information.

So a variety of different data sources have been used. Village level data were available from surveys carried out in 1981, 2009 and 2011, as well as from some secondary sources. Sample surveys of households were carried out in 1981-82, 1998-99, 2009-10 and 2011, covering a range of economic and social variables.³ These surveys have been complemented with in-depth case studies of family histories carried out in February-March 2012. Some 20 case studies were chosen altogether in the two villages; they are listed in Annex 1. They were selected, using information gathered in the earlier household surveys, to capture diversity in social and economic situations within the villages.

Some key indicators for the two villages are given in table 1. Chandkura is a medium-sized and compact village, with a population of 2401 inhabitants in 2001⁴ and a population density of 1132 persons per square kilometre at that time, slightly above the rural Bihar average of 1102, which in turn is much higher than the average for India as a whole. This is a multi-caste village (17 castes) dominated by Kurmis, who are mostly medium or big peasants. Scheduled Castes (mainly Paswans and Chamars), numerically the largest group, are the main source of wage labour. The village is well connected. The nearest pucca road, bus stop and railway station are no more than 1 km away, although the village cannot be reached by motor vehicles for short periods during the rainy season. Connections with the outside world are through Hilsa, a small market town 6 kms away, Fatuha (also spelt

Table 1
Key Characteristics of the Villages

	<i>Mahisham</i>	<i>Chandkura</i>
Census data		
Population 2001	4,370	2,401
Sex ratio (women per 1000 men - 2001)	959	976
Male literacy rate 2001	52%	68%
Female literacy rate 2001	29%	36%
Area of village (ha.)	374	212
IHD 2009-10 survey		
Dominant group	Brahmins and Muslims	Kurmis
Households with migrants	85%	44%
Proportion of net sown area under multiple crops	61%	96%
Average yield of paddy (quintals per acre)	9	12
Households operating land	42%	51%
Agricultural labour households	49%	45%
Farming households	35%	42%
Men aged 15-59 whose principal occupation is agriculture and allied activities	30%	44%
Development index score*	13 (low)	20 (middle)

Notes: * The development index is a composite of nine village-level variables, with a relative score on each of 1 to 3. The index can therefore range from 9 to 27 (observed values in Bihar actually ranged from 10 to 26).

Sources: Census of India, 2001; IHD Bihar Household Survey, 2009-10.

Fatwah), a big market hub and railway junction 15 kms away, and Patna, the state capital, 40 kms away. The land is fertile and is well situated near a highway and at commuting distance from urban centres, which has led to some speculation.

Most houses in Chandkura are pucca at least in part, and there is a pucca drainage system in many village streets, although only a few toilets. Drinking water supply through public and private handpumps is generally considered adequate by villagers. In 2009 there were seventeen shops of various types, four flour mills, a middle school, a primary health subcentre and an anganwadi centre. Electricity reached the village in 2008 but the transformer burned in 2011 and had not been repaired at the time of our visit in 2012; there were a few private generators and solar panels.

In contrast Mahisham is a big village (4370 inhabitants in 2001), spread over six tolas, quite far apart, though the population density is similar to Chandkura (1168 persons per square km.). It is more remote and not so well connected, though the new four lane East-West Highway, which is almost complete, passes only 20 km away. A pucca road touches upon one end of the village without entering it. Not all the tolas can be reached by motor vehicle and being prone to flood parts of the village are cut off for several months in the rainy season. Most outside contacts are through Madhepur, a small town and the block headquarters situated 2 kms from the main tola across a river (a bridge was built in 1982). The nearest railway station is in Jhanjharpur, a medium sized town 16 kms away. For access to a bigger urban centre people go to Darbhanga in the neighbouring district rather than to the District headquarters, Madhubani, because it is easier to reach. Mahisham has a mixed population of Muslims and Hindus (14 castes). The three most numerous groups are Muslims (33 per cent of all households), Musahars (21 per cent) and Brahmins (20 per cent). The latter is the dominant group by virtue of their control over land and political connections. Larger cultivators and landlords are mostly Brahmins, along with a few Muslim households, some of them descendants of old zamindari families. Scheduled Castes (predominantly Musahars) and poor Muslims are the main suppliers of wage labour.

In Mahisham, the Main Tola consists mainly of pucca buildings, some of them quite elaborate, but there is a lot of lower quality housing in outlying tolas. There is no effective drainage system, but a few toilets in private houses. Drinking water through public and (mostly) private handpumps was reported to be adequate. In 2009 there were twenty-seven shops and tea stalls, fourteen flour and rice mills and four tailors. There were three primary schools, a middle school and a madarsa, a primary health subcentre and five anganwadi centres. There is electricity in parts of the village but not in all the tolas – in particular not the Main Tola – and it was available only 3 hours daily on average in 2012. About 350 households were connected. Another 700 households have a connection through commercial generators.

II. THE AGRARIAN SYSTEM

In the 1980s the agrarian system in both villages was characterized as “semi-feudal” (Prasad et al, 1988); that is to say, the system of production and distribution was built on interlocking land, credit and labour markets, and there was a well defined class structure including

landlords and large peasants at the top, hiring in labour (often attached or bonded in some way) and renting out land, several categories of medium and small peasants cultivating their own land with or without hired labour, and casual and attached agricultural wage workers at the bottom. The main difference between the villages lay in the caste pattern. As noted above, Chandkura was dominated by Kurmis, a middle caste (OBC-II) with a reputation as agriculturalists; Mahisham was dominated by Brahmins, many of whom were less personally engaged with agriculture and so more likely to be landlords or only supervising agricultural work.

The observed class structure in 1981 and 2009 is given in table 2 below. It can be seen that in 1981 Chandkura had less landlords than Mahisham, but many more peasants, especially in the larger categories; it also had more attached labour. Only 17 per cent of Chandkura households were landless casual workers, as against 37 per cent in Mahisham. Chandkura's agrarian model was therefore based on peasant cultivators rather than landlords, engaging a substantial permanent work force, while Mahisham's was more polarized, with a larger proportion of landlords, less peasants and over half of households undertaking casual wage work.

In the last 30 years, however, there has been some degree of convergence between the two villages in terms of class structure. Attached labour has disappeared, and so have pure landlords, except for a small minority in Mahisham. Chandkura's peasants have broadly maintained their position, while this class has grown in Mahisham. Chandkura's attached labourers have mainly become landless casual agricultural labour, so this category has increased, and by 2009 it constituted about half of all households in both villages. Mahisham, on the other hand, shows little change in the proportion of casual agricultural labour, the big increase coming in households with no agricultural activity. This category has also grown in Chandkura, but not to the same extent.

Table 2
Class distribution of households (%), 1981 and 2009

	<i>Mahisham</i>		<i>Chandkura</i>	
	<i>1981</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>2009</i>
Landlords	9.4	1.3	6.4	0
Large peasants	11.1	12.5	20.3	18.7
Middle peasants	4.0	7.9	11.2	11.1
Small peasants	4.7	8.1	3.7	8.6
Attached agricultural labour	14.0	0.2	23.0	0
Casual agricultural labour with land*	15.1	11.4	16.0	9.1
Casual agricultural labour landless	36.7	39.7	17.1	42.0
No agricultural work	5.1	18.9	2.1	10.5

Notes: "Landlords" rented out land and did no more than supervise agricultural work. Peasant households cultivated land themselves. "Small" peasants did not hire labour in. In "Large" peasant households only male family members worked on the land, in addition to hired labour, while in "Middle" peasant households both male and female members were engaged in cultivation.

* Cultivating land (whether owned or leased in).

Source: IHD Bihar Household Survey, 2009-10; ANSISS-ILO Bihar Survey, 1981-2.

In fact the rather small proportion of households with “no agricultural work”, even in 2009, does not reflect the true importance of non-agricultural occupations in the villages. In many households, agricultural work is a secondary occupation. If we take the principal occupation of the head of the household as an indicator of the main occupation of the household, 53 per cent of households in Mahisham and 46 per cent in Chandkura were mainly non-agricultural in 2009. A substantial fraction of this non-agricultural work concerns commuting outside the village or migration to distant destinations, rather than occupations in the village itself. In 1981 agriculture was the dominant activity in 77 per cent of households in Mahisham and 85 per cent in Chandkura, so the occupational change over the last 30 years is clearly substantial. We discuss this in more detail in section IV.

How did these changes appear in our case studies? Several agricultural labourers told the story of the end of attached labour in Chandkura, which basically occurred in the 1990s. It seems to have been a reasonably peaceful transition in this village (though it has been violent elsewhere in Bihar). Larger peasants were mechanizing, with a rapid spread of power tillers and some tractors. This made it relatively expensive to keep bullocks, and without the bullocks permanent ploughmen, the largest category of attached labour, were redundant. The larger peasants were also making efforts to consolidate their land, which increased the efficiency of mechanized farming. Attached workers had been bonded at earlier dates, through indebtedness and the provision of small plots of land against which they provided labour services. But several labourers reported that in the 1990s they simply gave back their plots of land to the landlord or employer and shifted unhindered to casual labour, which paid better – suggesting that the labour market had tightened in the meantime. Raja Ram Prasad, formerly a large scale employer, said that he had invested in mechanization because labourers today “did not work honestly and thought only of their wages...” – it was much easier to manage machines than people. Kalpana Wilson, who studied Chandkura in the mid 1990s, saw the decline of labour attachment as one outcome of labour struggles in Chandkura and elsewhere, especially a series of strikes in the 1980s (Wilson, 1999). But the death of the semi-feudal system only occurred once the economic incentives for its persistence had weakened.

In Mahisham, the agrarian system was much less productive. The landlords, Brahmins and a few Muslims, were less engaged with agriculture and much land was rented out. This seems to have led to a less tightly organized labour process, and there was little reference to attached labour among our case studies. It was always less than in Chandkura, and probably started to decline earlier.⁵ One reason was certainly the high rates of out-migration from the village, even decades ago, which provided an alternative to attached labour. Mechanization has replaced bullocks for ploughing and transport here too, but the process was far from complete, even in 2012, for many bullocks could be seen working in the fields when they were rare in Chandkura; and there were still a few permanent ploughmen. There was evidence in our case studies of some economic decline among the previously dominant Brahmin caste. While there remained some large and well off Brahmin households, smaller landowners had been selling off their land, and increasingly relying on non-agricultural income from outside the

village. So in Mahisham there seems to have been a flattening of land and class differences, which – if it continues – may lead to divergence between the status – caste – hierarchy and the economic hierarchy. But one large Brahmin land owner, faced with declining income as a landlord, had taken the opposite tack and had recently started to cultivate his own land himself, with hired labour, rather than leasing it out.

These differences in agrarian relations between the villages are closely connected with land use and cropping patterns. In 2009 average landholding (among households owning land) was slightly higher in Chandkura at 1.9 acres against 1.7 in Mahisham; landlessness was slightly lower in the former (61 per cent) than the latter (64 per cent); and the coefficient of variation of land holding, a measure of inequality, was also slightly lower in Chandkura (2.6) than Mahisham (2.9). But these are not very large differences. Nor was there much difference in the amount of land leased in, 0.33 acres per household on average in Chandkura against 0.38 in Mahisham. The key difference comes in cropping patterns and technology.

Chandkura has a diverse and in some respects advanced pattern of cropping. Ninety-six per cent of the sown area was under multiple cropping in 2009. In 1981 fifty per cent of the net area sown was already irrigated by tubewell; by 2009 it had increased to over eighty per cent and an ahar-pyne, under construction in 2012, was expected to extend irrigation further. Initiated in the mid-1970s, crop diversification has intensified. Maize, onions, potatoes, mustard and coriander are cultivated as commercial crops in addition to the traditional crops of paddy, wheat and pulses. Yields are fairly high: 13 quintals per acre for paddy and 11 quintals for wheat in 2008-9. This compares with 8 quintals for paddy in 1981-2 and 11 in 1995-6; and 5 quintals for wheat in 1981-2 and 9 in 1995-6, an annual growth rate of yield of about 2 per cent for paddy and 3 per cent for wheat.⁶ Modern technology and mechanisation have spread – the use of power-tillers, high yielding varieties (including hybrid seeds), fertilizers and more recently pesticides is quasi-universal. Raja Ram Prasad, the largest cultivator among our case studies, with 11 acres of owned land and another 4 acres leased in, had a great deal of agricultural equipment, including equipment for zero tillage practices. He was even thinking of purchasing a combine harvester because of the difficulties of getting reliable labour for harvesting. He had many complaints about lack of government support and the non-availability of quality seeds and fertiliser, but clearly had a highly productive farm, which has generated enough revenue for him to move downstream into agro-processing, since he owned a rice mill and was constructing a second in 2012. Smaller peasants too are very aware of agricultural options. Ramdhani Prasad, who cultivated about 4 acres, was growing several commercial crops (coriander and potato, and he was considering growing mung because the price was high), had been using fertiliser and pesticides for many years, purchased high quality seed and had been purchasing and selling land in order to consolidate his holdings.

Mahisham is much more traditional and much less commercial. In 1981 only 20 per cent of the land was irrigated by private pumpsets and agriculture was largely dependent on the monsoon. In 2009 seventy per cent of the cultivated area was irrigated but the cropping pattern had not changed much. Paddy, wheat and pulses remained the main crops, and there had

been little diversification into additional commercial crops. However, there was a significant area of orchard. Average yields were low: 9 quintals per acre for both paddy and wheat (6 quintals was reported for each in 1981-2, implying a growth rate of about 1.5 per cent per year on average). Small cultivators reported routine use of fertilisers and, within the last few years, pesticides, although one medium peasant, Narayan Yadav, commented that pesticides had been responsible for sickness among animals, and there are few records of pesticide use in the household survey. Overall agriculture is less intensive, as can be seen in the average expenditure on fertilisers (Rs 1,087 per acre cultivated in Mahisham in 2010-11 against Rs 2,318 in Chandkura), on pesticides (only Rs 9 per acre on average in Mahisham against Rs 733 in Chandkura – this reflects the much more intensive use of pesticides in vegetable cultivation than in grain) and the average value of agricultural machinery (Rs 258 per acre in Mahisham against Rs 4,525 in Chandkura). About the same proportion of operational holdings was leased in in the two villages (about 45 per cent), so tenancy does not seem to be the reason for these differences, which reflect a different dynamic of production relations, but also an economy that is much more centred on the village in Chandkura, and much more oriented to job opportunities outside the village in Mahisham.

III. ASSETS

One important difference between the two villages lies in what people own. We distinguish several different types of assets: productive assets, housing and personal possessions, since the pattern is different for each.

Among productive assets, land is by far the most important. Chandkura had much more land per household than Mahisham in 1981. Since that date land per household has declined as a result of population growth in both villages, but much more sharply in Chandkura (table 3). At the same time, landlessness increased much faster in Chandkura, from 40 to 61 per cent, than in Mahisham, from 62 to 64 per cent, so that land owned per landholding household (i.e. average farm size) did not decline so fast. Chandkura still had larger landholdings per household than Mahisham in 2009, and a larger average farm size, but the village has converged towards the pattern of Mahisham, so that today there is not much difference in average landholdings between the two villages.

Nevertheless, there is a big difference in the value of this land. In Chandkura the price of land per acre in 2009 was reported as Rs 11,00,000 (irrigated land near road side), Rs 6,50,000 (irrigated near the village settlement) down to Rs 3,00,000 (non-irrigated in the interior); Mahisham being more remote and an “end of the road” destination, the price was much lower, varying from Rs 4,00,000 per acre (irrigated land near the main settlement and the road side) to Rs 1,50,000 (non-irrigated in the interior). As a result, the average land value per household, at Rs 3.1 lakhs, was more than twice as high in Chandkura as in Mahisham in 2009 (table 4), and per landowning household the difference was higher still.⁷

Table 3
Land and landlessness, 1981 and 2009

	<i>Mahisham</i>	<i>Chandkura</i>
Average land/household 1981 (acres)	0.83	1.68
Average land/household 2009	0.63	0.74
Land per landowning hhd 1981 (acres)	2.19	2.78
Land per landowning hhd 2009	1.73	1.89
Landlessness 1981 (per cent)	62	40
Landlessness 2009 (per cent)	64	61

Note: These data are from household surveys. Independent (village level) data for 2009 give a very similar figure of land per household for Mahisham (0.67 acres) but a higher figure for Chandkura (1.18). So the estimate for Chandkura may be an underestimate. However some land in Chandkura is owned outside the village, which would not be covered in the household survey, so we cannot assume that the higher figure is correct. In any case, this does not qualitatively change the pattern observed.

Source: IHD Bihar Household Survey, 2009-10; ANSISS-ILO Bihar Survey, 1981-82.

Ownership of agricultural productive assets per household was six times higher in Chandkura than in Mahisham in 2009 (table 4). This gap was almost the same as in 1981, when it was 6.5 times, though at a much lower level of asset ownership. So the difference between the villages in agricultural investment shows up clearly in the productive assets concerned, and this difference has persisted over time. Non-agricultural productive assets were also higher in Chandkura. On the other hand, in 2009 there was higher livestock ownership in Mahisham, whereas the reverse was true in 1981. This is mainly because of the persistence of traditional (bullock powered) ploughing and threshing methods in Mahisham – 24 bullocks per 100 households in Mahisham in 2009 but only 1 in Chandkura, although there were also somewhat more milch animals in Mahisham (36 per hundred households against 33 in Chandkura). Chandkura reported rather higher loans in 2009, for both institutional and non-institutional credit. This too was virtually unchanged from 1981.

Table 4
Value of Assets (Average per Household, Rs.), 2009

	<i>Mahisham</i>	<i>Chandkura</i>
Land	1.2 lakhs	3.1 lakhs
Agricultural productive assets (per land-owning household)	1664	11194
Non-agricultural productive assets (per household engaged in non-agric. work)	662	2093
Livestock	7732	5876
Loans	2704	4879
Housing	0.7 lakh	1.6 lakh
Non-agricultural vehicles	3393	2627
Other domestic assets	5138	4062

Source: IHD Bihar Household Survey, 2009-10.

The quality of housing in Chandkura tends to be higher than in Mahisham, and this is reflected in housing values, which were more than twice as high in the former. 73 per cent of houses in Chandkura were pucca or partly pucca, against 61 per cent in Mahisham. In

both villages this is a major change compared with 1981, when only 17 per cent of houses in Chandkura had pucca or partly pucca walls, and just 6 per cent in Mahisham.

But for other assets the ranking of the two villages is reversed. The average value of (non-agricultural) vehicles was higher in Mahisham and the same was true of other domestic assets. This appears to reflect income generated by migration, which goes into durable consumption goods (mobile phones, motorbikes, etc) rather than being invested in productive assets. In Mahisham there were 35 motorbikes in 2009 against 22 in Chandkura and 100 televisions against 50, albeit for a larger population, and 85 mobile phones per hundred households against 75. With much higher migration in Mahisham (discussed below) there is also much more demand for mobile phones. In 1981 the value of domestic assets was higher in Chandkura than in Mahisham (Rs 272 against 191 – this is in 1981 prices, but it is still very small indeed; there was one bicycle for every 7 households in Chandkura and one for every 20 in Mahisham).

How does this show up in our case studies? In Chandkura we have already noted Raja Ram Prasad's high investment in agricultural equipment, but he is one of the richest people in the village. Smaller cultivators like Ramdhani Prasad tend to rent in equipment such as power tillers rather than buy them, although he had a pumpset, as do about half of cultivators in Chandkura, and a cow. He had a mobile phone but no mosquito nets, a private handpump and a couple of chairs. Plastic moulded chairs have now taken over from the wooden chairs that were common earlier. Small cultivators and sharecroppers, such as Indra Paswan and Chotan Mochi, both of whom sometimes got land for sharecropping, had very little agricultural equipment and few assets, although Chotan's son had a mobile phone. Several case study households were involved in non-agricultural work, and at least one, Jitendra Saw, who runs a shop, had substantial assets both in his stock and in the building where his shop is located. Jitendra had solar panels in his shop and his home, and his family had two mobile phones, two bicycles and storage equipment. Dharmvir Paswan, who was engaged in trading outside the village, also had substantial stocks for his business and a fairly sophisticated mobile phone, which he used to watch video clips and take photos (he took photos of the research team). Dharmvir Sharma, on the other hand, a carpenter by caste, had few assets, but he did more work as a daily wage labourer than as a carpenter.

In Mahisham, Chandrakishore Jha and his brother Chandrashekhar are among the better endowed households in the village, owning 7 to 8 acres of land between them. They had a substantial pucca house and a range of domestic possessions including 6 mobile phones. They owned a tractor, a pumpset and a cow, and had a diversified agricultural pattern. But other well-off families have invested less in agriculture. Raj Kumar Jha also owned 7 acres of land, but all was leased out until recently, and he had much less agricultural equipment. On the other hand, he and his brother, who was running the PDS shop, had a substantial house, a motorcycle and domestic equipment. A smaller cultivator like Narayan Yadav, who owned 2 acres and sharecropped another 2, used to own a plough and bullocks but sold them and in 2012 was instead hiring in a tractor for ploughing. He shared a pumpset with his brothers. He had three buffalos, a mobile phone and some basic furniture but few other

domestic assets apart from a fair-sized, partly pucca house. Smaller cultivators like Binod Mandal or Motilal Saday owned no agricultural equipment, but rented it in for ploughing, irrigation and threshing. In Mahisham, several households with small landholdings rented their land out, or cultivated only with hired labour, and owned few agricultural assets. But these households often had decent housing and a variety of domestic assets. For example, Md Salauddin, although only cultivating one acre with hired labour, lived with his mother and his sisters in a pucca house, with some furniture, two mobile phones, a television and a bicycle. But Mohammed Salauddin also came from an old zamindari family, and some of the assets may reflect the family's earlier status.

The lower investment in productive assets in Mahisham is no doubt partly a consequence of high migration. Many adult men, who would have been self-employed as cultivators or in non-agricultural occupations if they stayed in the village, were away; whereas in Chandkura most of them remained in the village, and the cultivators among them used some of the surplus from agricultural production for investment.

There is an important gender dimension to asset inequality. Gender relations are embedded in the institution of patriarchy in rural Bihar. Patriarchy is pervasive, and the most obvious indicator is that land, the most important asset in the rural areas, is essentially owned by men, and not women. In Chandkura, only 15 per cent of women from landowning households owned any land. In Mahisham, the corresponding figure was 6 per cent. Having said that, any discussion on gender relations must consider in more depth the work that men and women actually do.

IV. OCCUPATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT

1. Occupational structure

The pattern of occupation and employment has become much more complex over time. As noted above, in 1981 agriculture was dominant, and most other occupations were traditional caste activities. Today, not only is there a wider range of occupations in the village itself, but also many villagers working outside the village, either commuting to nearby locations (important in Chandkura) or migrating in large numbers to destinations all over India (especially from Mahisham). We discuss migration in more detail below, noting here that this is a major difference between the two villages, with consequences for the local pattern of employment.

In 2009 in Chandkura 46 per cent of household heads and 50 per cent of all workers reported a non-agricultural main occupation. Much of this non-agricultural work is outside the village. Over 200 villagers, depending on the season, were commuting to other villages or towns on a daily basis for wage work in construction, in brick kilns, in the railway yard or the market in Fatuha, and others worked as drivers or masons. A small number of villagers (25 men and 10 women) had regular jobs in government service or in private firms. Within the village caste occupations have almost completely disappeared; only 12 individuals were still engaged in such occupations (barber, carpenter, priest and dai). But there has been some growth in trade and services, such as village shops. Youth unemployment in the age

group 15 to 24 is significant but hard to measure since young people will often do some occasional work.

Among our case studies, most men had had a non-agricultural activity, mostly outside the village, at one time or another in their lives. Chotan Mochi headed a musical band for many years, playing in various locations. Dharmvir Sharma, previously a carpenter in the village, was now doing casual work in construction and in carpentry outside the village as well as casual agricultural wage labour. Dharmvir Paswan had tried various trading activities outside the village, including trading fish and poultry in nearby markets. Baldev Ravidas was too old to work, but his son Rajkumar was doing non-agricultural construction work as well as agricultural wage labour. Sibu Paswan was in much the same situation; his son and grandson were doing construction work as well as agricultural labour and sharecropping. Jitendra Saw was a shopkeeper in the village. His sons and wife were also working in the shop (the sons without great enthusiasm). Among the case studies, only Ramdhani Prasad, a middle peasant, was an exception, concentrating on his farming activities within the village.

In Mahisham the pattern was quite different. There were less non-agricultural households in the village overall, but many were still engaged in caste occupations (barber, carpenter, potter, fisherman, dai, priest or domestic service). An example is Malik Thakur, a carpenter by caste occupation, like Dharmvir Sharma in Chandkura. But unlike Dharmvir Sharma he owned two acres of land and leased in another acre and a half, so his main occupation was in agriculture. However, his two sons had both continued as carpenters, one of them outside the village, and by modernizing their skills they had – also unlike Dharmvir Sharma – achieved a reasonable income stream, although they only had Rs 8-10,000 worth of equipment. The skills and the caste tradition were clearly more important than the equipment.

Eleven households from Mahisham were engaged in the preparation of snacks (done by women) and four in bidi-making (done by men). Thirty men and thirteen women had regular jobs in the public or private sector. Commuting for work was fairly limited (60 men) and mainly concerned construction work and brick making (there is a brick kiln on the edge of the village). On the other hand the incidence of migration to more distant destinations was extremely high (81 per cent). Short-term migration is mainly for agricultural wage work, while the occupations of longer term migrants are highly diversified (construction, textile industry, tailoring, embroidery, personal service, petty business, security guard, rickshaw puller, hotel work, etc.).

There are some important implications for the overall pattern of employment and occupation in the village. 53 per cent of household heads and 62 per cent of all workers reported a non-agricultural main occupation, more than in Chandkura, but most of these concerned long-distance migration. Excluding migrants, only 26 per cent of workers reported a non-agricultural main occupation in Mahisham, compared with 33 per cent in Chandkura. In other words, within the village Mahisham is less diversified than Chandkura, with a higher concentration on traditional occupations. Only 18 per cent of women in Mahisham reported a non-agricultural main occupation. Within the village, the majority of agricultural wage

workers were women, while men who reported a principal occupation in agriculture were more likely to be small and medium peasants.

The rather traditional and undifferentiated cropping pattern in Mahisham leads to large variations in demand for agricultural labour. The period of our case study work, for instance, at the end of February, was a slack period with only pulses and wheat in the ground and little work until harvesting time in March-April. Local agricultural labourers were therefore largely unemployed, as they would be again in May, June and October. During the same period, in Chandkura, there was heavy labour demand in February for transplanting of onion, weeding of potatoes and other work on the diverse crops grown in that village.

This lack of local employment in traditional agriculture may have been the original motivation for migration from Mahisham, but once migration had become established it implied that labour was not necessarily available when it was needed for more intensive agriculture, discouraging agricultural investment and innovation. In other words, higher migration and agricultural underdevelopment fed on each other.

2. The sexual division of labour

There is a very marked sexual division of labour in both villages. In Chandkura, 59 per cent of women aged 15-59 years reported domestic work as their primary activity in 2009, while this was true of only one per cent of the men. 3 per cent of women gave own account work as their primary activity (25 per cent of men); 6 per cent regular wage/salaried work (18 per cent of men) and 8 per cent casual wage work (32 per cent of men). The pattern is similar in Mahisham, where the gap between women and men was even larger, with over 80 per cent of adult women reporting domestic work as their primary work status, and correspondingly less reporting own account work or casual or regular labour. This vast divergence in the work statuses of men and women defines gender relations.

If we compare the principal occupations of men and women, we find that in 2009 the bulk of women workers (aged 15-59) were concentrated in agriculture in both Chandkura and Mahisham – 63 and 72 per cent, respectively (74-80 per cent if livestock is included), while for men the corresponding proportions were 40 per cent in Chandkura and 28 per cent in Mahisham. Otherwise, women were concentrated in just two occupations - teaching (11 per cent in Chandkura and 8 per cent in Mahisham) and health services (9 per cent and 12 per cent respectively). As we have seen above, there is considerable diversification into non-agricultural work, but these opportunities are highly skewed in a gender perspective, for they are largely outside the village, and employment outside the village is essentially confined to men, while women remain dependent on activities located in the village, which are largely agricultural in nature.

Secondary occupations are far less gendered than primary activity. In Mahisham almost as large a proportion of women as of men reported secondary activities in own account work (18 per cent compared with 20 per cent) or casual wage labour (40 per cent against 44 per cent). In Chandkura the gap between women and men was somewhat larger (13 and 24 per cent for own account work, 35 and 43 for casual wage labour), but still much less than for principal occupation.

Has the pattern of labour force participation changed over the thirty years under scrutiny? Not for men: the male labour force participation rate (combining primary and secondary activities) in 2009 – 89 per cent in Chandkura and 94 per cent in Mahisham – was almost identical to the figures for 1981. Nor had labour force participation for women changed in Chandkura, where it was 65 per cent in both years. But there was a striking increase in female labour force participation in Mahisham, which had jumped by 15 percentage points from 60 to 75 per cent. This is consistent with the hypothesis that one of the effects of male migration is a higher participation of women in economic activities.

This overall pattern was clearly reflected in our case studies. In both the villages, women universally undertook domestic work, and young daughters-in-law often did not report any other work. For instance, in Chandkura, the daughters-in-law of Ramdhani Prasad, Bhajan Mistry and Jitendra Saw did not undertake any work other than domestic work. Similarly, in Mahisham, Lalji Kamat's and Ugant Lal Jha's daughters-in-law did only domestic work.

In both Chandkura and Mahisham, in poor households women worked as casual wage labourers in addition to performing their domestic responsibilities. In cultivating households, women generally worked as unpaid family workers, for example, the wives of Binod Mandal and Malik Thakur in Mahisham or Ramdhani Prasad in Chandkura, all of them small or medium peasants cultivating from 1 to 4 acres of land. On the other hand, in Brahmin and better-off Muslim households in Mahisham women did not undertake agricultural work outside the house. But Rajkumar Jha's wife was working in the village anganwadi centre. In Chandrashekhar Jha's household the women prepared food for hired workers and he commented that they could work outside the house if suitable work were available. So the bar on women's work does not apply to higher status occupations; the problem is that there are very few such occupations.

In each village, only one woman among our case studies reported a non-agricultural primary activity; in Chandkura, Parmila Devi managed the shop with her husband Jitendra and their sons. In Mahisham, Motilal Saday's daughter-in-law, Kameshwari Devi, worked as an anganwadi sahayika. Both women also undertook agricultural work in the family farms.

The similarities in occupational pattern of women are striking in the two villages. In matters of domestic work, conventional gender roles are at play; women universally undertake domestic work, and men do not. Outside the home, women's work remains concentrated in agriculture and allied activities, because they are largely confined to the village where few non-agricultural opportunities are available. The little work that they do in non-agricultural occupations is highly gendered; they are found only in two sectors – teaching and modern health services. The bulk of the new opportunities, largely outside the village, are open mostly to men. It is also interesting, and surprising, to find that in both the villages, women do not work in the construction sector. This may be attributed to social norms that make it difficult for women to work in such occupations, though this provides little real explanation since in some other parts of Bihar women are found working on construction sites.

V. WAGES

Wage patterns in rural Bihar are extraordinarily complex, and they differ in important ways between the two villages.

1. Chandkura

In 1981 the most common agricultural daily wage ranged from 1 pucca seer (equivalent to 0.93 kg)⁸ of rice plus a nasta to 1 pucca seer of rice plus nasta plus one meal for a full day's work. By 1995-96 it had increased to 2 kg of grain plus nasta plus one meal for a full day and 1.5 kg plus one meal for half a day, and this was still the case in 1999.⁹ In 2011 the wage was still paid in kind, at a minimum full day rate of 2.5 kg of rice plus nasta and one meal¹⁰. However wage rates had become more differentiated according to the agricultural operation, the sex of the labourer and the peaks of demand for labour.

In 2011 ploughing, hoeing and transplanting were whole day operations while weeding was done on a half day basis. Transplanting of paddy was the most labour intensive operation. It was spread over four weeks but the peak demand for labour would last for 4-5 days, during which period daily wages rose up to 5 kg. During transplanting of onions the daily wage would rise to 3.5 kg at the peak period.

Traditionally harvesting is paid on a share basis. The labourers' harvest share increased from 1/16th of the harvested crop in 1981 to 1/14th in 2009-10. But here again several systems co-existed. The share was 1 (bundle) in 21 when the labourer made his/her own bundle but 1 in 14 when the bundle size was controlled by the employer. Labourers of course make bigger bundles for themselves if given the chance. It was estimated that on average a labourer's harvest share could yield a daily equivalent of 10 kg of paddy, 6 kg of wheat, 12 kg of maize or 15 kg of onions in the harvest of these crops. It is obvious that harvest shares yield a bonus in comparison to other agricultural operations and farmers tend to favour family labour over hired labour for harvesting as much as possible.

Are the wage earnings the same for men and women? The most common daily wage and the harvest share were said to be the same for both sexes, but one needs to allow for the division of labour that prevails in agricultural operations. Ploughing and hoeing, exclusively done by men, were remunerated 4.5 to 5 kg of rice for a full day's work. For transplanting men uprooted seedlings while women planted them and they were not remunerated on the same basis. Men were paid a piece rate (20-25 kg of rice per katha¹¹) while women were paid on a daily basis, 3.5 kg of rice plus a meal. For transplanting onions men were paid 3-4 kg of rice for uprooting and women 2.5 kg for planting. For weeding men and women were paid the same - 2 kg of rice plus nasta for half-day work - but this work is mostly done by women.

In fact there was no fixed wage; the remuneration level depended on the bargaining power of labourers and employers, which varied with the season. It would be more accurate to say that there was a floor wage, and wages could rise above the floor, depending on fluctuations in the demand for labour. In 1981 Chandkura was a labour surplus village and wages were low. Since then work opportunities for unskilled labour outside agriculture have increased within commuting distance from the village. Men take advantage of those opportunities and

tend to restrict their agricultural work inside the village to the most remunerative operations and periods. But women are less mobile, they remain confined to the village and have to take what is on offer. This differentiation in employment opportunities clearly helps to segment the wage system in the village.

Non-agricultural wage work is paid much more than agricultural work. In 2011 unskilled construction work was paid Rs 100 a day in the village, skilled construction work Rs 200 and carpentry work Rs 200. Outside the village earthwork was paid Rs 120-130 a day.

One can wonder at finding agricultural wages still paid in kind in a village where the traditional jajmani system of annual payments in kind has disappeared and the economy at large is increasingly monetised.¹² This has an important bearing on the labourers' well-being. Within the village, women are compelled to barter their earnings in kind against essential grocery items such as oil, salt, etc. at unfavourable terms of trade. It was reported that the village shop keeper was "buying" their grain for Rs 10 a kilo while "selling" grain at Rs 20 a kilo. Poor households who cannot store grain are both sellers and buyers.

2. Mahisham

In 1981 labourers were paid mostly in kind, as in Chandkura, and the most common wage for a full day's work ranged from 2 pucca seers of any grain¹³ (i.e. about 1.9 kg) plus a nasta up to 4 kaccha seers of grain (i.e. 2.3 kg) plus a nasta. But by 1999 wage payment in cash prevailed and men were getting Rs 20 (in current prices) plus one meal for a full day and Rs 10 plus a meal for half a day. In 2011 daily wages varied with the type of operation and the length of the working day. Ploughing and post-harvest operations were full day work while other agricultural operations were undertaken and remunerated on a half day basis. Ploughing and post-harvesting work was paid Rs 60-70 plus nasta¹⁴ plus one meal. Transplanting was done by both men and women and paid a piece rate: Rs 40 for 20 fistfuls of seedlings, plus nasta. It takes about half a day to transplant this volume of seedlings and labourers could choose to work a full day and be paid double rate. Weeding was done by women and working time was variable, between two hours and half a day, so remuneration ranged from Rs 25 plus nasta to Rs 50, the most common being Rs 30 plus nasta.

In 1981 labourers were given 1/15th share for harvesting, and at the time the harvest wage was worth double the usual wage income. By 1999-2000 the harvest share had increased to 1/12th for paddy and wheat; it remained the same in 2011. Labourers could earn on average 12 kg per day (of paddy) for harvesting paddy and 6 kg a day for harvesting wheat. The harvest share was 1/8th for pulses. Post harvest operations (threshing and winnowing) were remunerated 2.5 kg per 40 kg (i.e. 1/16th).

Like for Chandkura non-agricultural wage work in or around Mahisham was more remunerative than agricultural activities. In 2011 casual non-agricultural wage labour was paid from Rs 100 (with nasta and meal) to Rs 150 (without nasta or meal) per day. Skilled construction work such as masonry and carpentry was paid Rs 200 plus nasta plus one meal. A full time tractor driver was paid Rs 3000 a month plus nasta plus one meal for a working day of up to 12 hours.

3. Evolution of wages in the two villages

In 1981 wages were paid in kind in both villages but the rates were quite far apart. The most common daily wage in Mahisham was in the range 2.2 to 2.5 kg of grain (including the nasta) compared with 1.2 to 1.7 kg in Chandkura. At first sight, this difference may seem surprising since the former village was agriculturally backward and the latter much more advanced. But in a situation of labour surplus daily wages also reflect the amount of work available the whole year round and the overall earnings of the labouring households. In Mahisham production and yields were much lower than in Chandkura, but as a result employment levels also were lower and therefore higher daily wages had to be paid for the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force.

By 2011 the wage differential between the two villages had more or less disappeared. For example half-day weeding was remunerated 2 kg of rice plus nasta in Chandkura and Rs 30 plus nasta in Mahisham. At the time of the survey the average retail price of rice in Chandkura was Rs 14-16 per kilo which would bring the wage rate to Rs 28-32 plus a nasta, broadly equivalent to that in Mahisham. It seems that wages had been increasing faster in Chandkura than in Mahisham over the last five years. For example, in Chandkura the female full day wage rate for transplanting was reported to be (in cash equivalent at current prices) Rs 22 in 2006, Rs 40 in 2008 and Rs 62 in 2010, while in Mahisham the half day wage for the same work was reported to be Rs 25, Rs 30 and Rs 40 in those three years. In Chandkura the wage rate for ploughing (in rupee equivalent including nasta and meal) was reported as Rs 30 in 2006, Rs 50 in 2008 and Rs 90 in 2010. In Mahisham it was reported as Rs 50, Rs 70 and Rs 95 respectively.

How far have wages risen over the 30 year period of the study? With this level of complexity in the wage system it is impossible to give a simple answer. But in Chandkura we can compare the 1981 wage of 1 pucca seer of rice plus a nasta and sometimes a meal with the minimum (floor) wage in 2011 of 2.5 kg plus a nasta plus a meal. In 1981 a meal was generally considered the equivalent of half a kg of rice or roti, a nasta 250 grams.¹⁵ So we can compare a total wage of 1.2 to 1.7 kg of rice in 1981 with at least 3.25 kg in 2011, a rise of between 90 and 170 per cent. This is a minimum because of the increase in the wage at peak seasons in 2011. If instead we take the 3.5 kg plus meal per day reported for transplanting paddy, so about 4 kg in total, the rise would be of the order of 135 to 230 per cent. In Mahisham the comparison is more difficult because of the switch from kind to cash. One way is to convert the cash wage in 2011 into grain, for comparability with Chandkura. If we take the full day wage of Rs 60 to 70 plus nasta reported for some operations in 2011, this comes to the equivalent of 3.75 to 4 kg of rice at local retail prices. Compared with the 1.9 to 2.3 kg per day reported in 1981, this is an increase in the range 63 to 110 per cent, substantial but less than in Chandkura.¹⁶

In 1981 both Chandkura and Mahisham were labour-surplus villages. In 2012 farmers in both places complained about the difficulty of hiring labour, but the process has evolved differently in the two villages. The pressure on land and poorly performing agriculture in Mahisham pushed labourers to look for sources of earning outside the village. Development

in North Bihar being sluggish they migrated further afield, to other states in Western India. In the case of Chandkura a more dynamic agriculture offered work opportunities in the village. Over the last decade the growth of the Bihar economy has picked up and work opportunities have been created within the commuting belt of Chandkura (from Hilsa to Patna). Non-agricultural wage work being more remunerative than agricultural activities, competition for labour inside the village drove agricultural wages up.

A gender dimension needs to be added to the analysis. Only men are migrating or commuting to find jobs outside the villages, resulting in shortages of male labour for agricultural work. There are two likely effects on the labour market for women (i) an increase in the participation of women in the labour force (both as wage labourers and unpaid family workers) and (ii) a narrowing of the gender wage differential. Both effects are observed, but the pattern is different in the two villages. In Mahisham, female labour force participation has increased, although agricultural employment is shared among an increasing female labour force and half day work seems to have become the usual pattern. But the sluggishness of agricultural production and the lack of alternative job opportunities for women within the village have slowed down the progression of female wages. On the other hand, in Chandkura crop diversification, and the expansion of crops that require weeding and other labour-intensive operations, increased the demand for female labour and hence pushed the wage up. Over the last five years the female wage for weeding has been multiplied by three (in current rupee terms) in Chandkura while it has been multiplied by only two in Mahisham.

It can be concluded that, in 1981, agricultural wages were determined by internal factors such as the size of the village labour force and the agrarian structure. Nutritionally-based wage determination prevailed. Thirty years later external factors have gained importance, since a large part of the male labour force is increasingly employed both outside agriculture and outside the village. Village labour markets are now integrated into regional and national labour markets and rural wage determination responds to market forces, though many institutional features persist.

VI. MIGRATION AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY

In both villages the vagaries of the weather triggered early streams of outmigration, temporary in nature. In Chandkura, the drought (and subsequent famine) of 1966-7 was an event still fresh in the memory of the elders who were compelled to go to Assam in search of paltry earnings. In Mahisham, floods were recurrent and sent seasonal waves of distress migration towards the fields of north-western India. In 1981, there were temporary migrants in 24 per cent of households in Mahisham and 11 per cent in Chandkura. By 1998 the migration rate had more than doubled: migrants were reported in 52 per cent of households in Mahisham and 23 per cent in Chandkura. And migration continued to increase. In 2009, 82 per cent of households in Mahisham, and 44 per cent in Chandkura, reported at least one migrant member. So over the whole of this period, Mahisham was a “high” migration village, Chandkura “low”, but the rate of migration rose steadily in both.

Migration was essentially male; in 2009 men represented 73 per cent of all migrants in Chandkura and 86 per cent in Mahisham. Migration was overwhelmingly for work, either to find alternative job opportunities or to supplement the household income. In Chandkura, 31 per cent of men in the age group 15-59 migrated but only 9 per cent of women from the same age group. The corresponding figures for Mahisham were 65 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. Some youths (mostly young men) migrated for education purposes; they represented 11 per cent of all migrants in Chandkura and 6 per cent in Mahisham.

The duration of migration is determined by the type of employment migrants secure and the activities they continue to undertake in their villages. As shown in table 5, long term migration was more prominent in Chandkura while circular migration, whereby workers come back periodically to the village and notably at peak agricultural seasons, was higher in Mahisham. Permanent migration was also higher in Chandkura. Between 2004 and 2009, 10 families in Chandkura and 6 families in Mahisham had permanently migrated from the villages.

Table 5
Migration Pattern, 2009

	<i>Mahisham</i>	<i>Chandkura</i>
% of households with migrants	82	44
% of men among all migrants	86	73
% of migrants among males aged 15-59	65	31
% of migrants among females aged 15-59	8	9
% of students among migrants	6	11
% of male migrants aged 15-59 migrating for less than 3 months	13	5
% of male migrants migrating between 3 and 8 months	32	34
% of male migrants migrating > 8 months	54	61

Source: IHD, Bihar Household Survey 2009-10.

Where do the migrant workers go? The ‘first’ destination is urban for both villages but much more so in Chandkura than in Mahisham (97 per cent of migrant households in Chandkura against 75 per cent in Mahisham). 95 per cent of the migrants from Mahisham and 60 per cent from Chandkura went outside the State. From Chandkura they went to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Punjab and Daman and Diu and further south to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. From Mahisham migrants went to Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, and the cities of Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chandigarh, among others. In Chandkura a significant group of migrants went to other districts of Bihar (Ara, Gaya and Patna), particularly to the state capital of Patna. From both villages there was also a small stream of migration outside the country (to the Middle East).

What do migrant workers do? A majority of male migrants from Chandkura (53 per cent) had a regular job as salaried or wage worker while among migrants from Mahisham the dominant work status was casual (daily) wage worker (61 per cent). Out-migrants from both villages reported a variety of principal occupations (see table 6). The two main types of activity were “industry” (which includes both small manufacturing workshops and

Table 6
Occupations of Male Migrant Workers Aged 15-59 (%), 2009

	Chandkura		Mahisham	
	Primary activity	Secondary activity	Primary activity	Secondary activity
Work status				
Own account	10	17	5	7
Regular wage/salaried worker	53	-	34	-
Casual wage worker	35	67	61	55
Unpaid family labour	-	11		29
Domestic work	2	5	< 1	9
Total	100	100	100	100
Type of activity				
Cultivation, livestock, fishery	6	88	14	81
Artisans	13	-	10	-
Personal services	-	-	7	-
Unskilled physical (Construction/Brick Making/Coolie)	19	6	22	19
Industry/Household industry	41	6	34	1
Trade/Commerce	5	-	7	-
Modern services and professionals	13	-	2	-
Lower level administrative work	3	-	2	-
Security workers	3	-	< 1	-
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: IHD Bihar Household Survey 2009-10.

Note: This table excludes migrants who are attending school or college.

larger factories) and “unskilled physical work” (mainly in construction and brick making). Chandkura had a higher proportion of professionals than Mahisham, reflecting the higher educational level of the village population (see section IX).

The pattern of secondary activities reported by migrant workers is very different from that of primary activities. For medium- and long-term migrants, primary activities concern work at destination while secondary activities refer to work back in their villages. About 63 per cent of migrants in Mahisham and 41 per cent in Chandkura reported a secondary activity, overwhelmingly in agriculture and allied activities (over 80 per cent in both villages) which shows that many migrants retain a link with the land and the economy of their villages. The dominant work status in secondary activities was casual wage worker (67 per cent in Chandkura and 55 per cent in Mahisham). But the categories of “unpaid family worker” (29 per cent in Mahisham and 11 per cent in Chandkura) and “own account worker” (17 per cent in Chandkura and 7 per cent in Mahisham) were also significant.

Migration for work was extremely rare among women. Most migrant women were accompanying their husbands and were primarily engaged in housework. A few from Mahisham undertook casual wage work and some from Chandkura, more educated, worked in modern social services.

What role does education play in migration? Among illiterate male workers aged 15-59, only 23 per cent migrated in Chandkura against 72 per cent in Mahisham. Migrants with no

education or only primary education were concentrated in the short-term migration streams, while more educated migrants were more likely to secure regular jobs. The propensity to migrate was high at higher levels of education. Migrants with the highest level of education (post class 12) were concentrated in occupations such as administration, technical and professional services, education and health.

Does caste have a bearing on the migration of workers? In Chandkura, the highest incidence of migration among male workers aged 15-59 was found in the upper castes (67 per cent) and the lowest incidence in the dominant (middle) caste, the Kurmis (19 per cent). Scheduled Castes and OBC-I had an intermediate migration rate (36 per cent), while migration was lower among other OBC-II (25 per cent).

The pattern of migration across castes is different in Mahisham. The highest incidence was recorded among the Scheduled Castes (82 per cent) and the lowest was found among Kurmis and other OBC-II (57 percent). For OBC-I, Muslims, and upper castes the incidence varied between 61 and 67 per cent. It is interesting that the incidence among upper castes was about the same in both Chandkura and Mahisham, while there were large differences for other castes.

In both villages migration tended to be highest among workers that belong to non-agricultural households (71 per cent in Chandkura and 81 per cent in Mahisham), but that is of course in part because the migrants themselves are mainly in non-agricultural occupations. This was followed by landless agricultural labourers and small peasants (around 35 per cent in Chandkura and 75 per cent in Mahisham). The lowest incidence was recorded among medium and large peasants (about 20 percent in Chandkura and almost 50 per cent in Mahisham).

What do we find in our case studies from Chandkura? In four out of the nine households interviewed, not a single person had ever migrated. As expected, the non-migrant households included cultivators, big and small – Raja Ram Prasad and Ramdhani Prasad respectively. The other non-migrant households, Baldev Ravidas and Shivaji Prasad, were both former attached labour households that owned no land. In the former, a Scheduled Caste household, all working members undertook casual wage labour in agriculture, while the latter was a sharecropper. This pattern of non-migrants in our case studies broadly resonates with the survey findings in the village.

Among households with migrating members, the earliest case of migration among the case studies was Sibu Paswan, who was about seventy-five years old. An erstwhile attached labourer, Sibu remembered migrating at the time of the drought of 1966-67, when the crop had failed. He went to Assam with 11 other villagers, and worked at a construction site for 3 months. But after that date no-one from the household migrated until about 6 years before our visit, when his son Indra went to Haryana to work in a brick kiln. Like Sibu, Indra went with fellow villagers, and returned after 3 months, but the circumstances of the father's and son's migrations could not have been more different. In Indra's case, the motivation for migration was to earn some cash, since agricultural wages in the village were paid in kind. But he chose to return after only a short period, as he found the work difficult. Rapid return from migration was quite widespread in the case studies from Chandkura. About two

years previously, Indra's son Bhola migrated with three other villagers to work in an iron nut and bolt factory in Ludhiana. Like his father, his motivation was to "earn money", but he returned within three months, as he did not like the work; "*kaam pasand nahin aaya*".

Similarly, Chotan Mochi went to Ahmedabad around 2003, and worked in a textile factory. In 2006 his son Ranjan went to Coimbatore and worked in a metalworking firm. But both returned after about 10 months. Chotan said that he came back as he had to care for his family, while Ranjan found the work hard (*kaam kada tha*). In the case of Jitendra Saw, his sons, Abhimanyu and Raju, had gone to Goa and Bombay respectively for work. Raju worked in a thermocol factory and Abhimanyu in an iron works. Both returned after 3 months, as they did not like the work; "*munn nahin laga toh chale aaye*". In the case of Bhajan Mistry's son, Ramvir, return migration was triggered by Bhajan's death; Ramvir had worked in an iron factory in Mumbai for a couple of years.

There were also some cases of self-employed migrants. Jitendra Saw went to Kolkata, and worked at his brother in law's grocery store. Upon his return to the village, he opened a grocery shop, which continues to do good business. Another example was Dharmvir Paswan, who set up a business (chicken shop) in Tehta in Jehanabad district near his in-laws. But own account work among migrants was infrequent, and Dharmvir's case is something of an outlier. Unlike the migrants in other case studies from Chandkura, Dharmvir's migration history was dense; he spent time working in a grease factory in Delhi (5 years), and moved to Goa (2 years) with the grease factory. He had also commuted to Patna and run a fish business, for which he procured fish from Patna and sold it in Hilsa.

In the case studies from Mahisham migration was – as expected – much more prevalent than in Chandkura; 11 out of 12 case study households reported migration among their members. Migration was entrenched in the village, in the psyche of its people. The migration histories of households as well as individual members were deep and dense. Individuals had been migrating for work for several decades. Salauddin was away for more than 15 years; Sabauddin and Samsul for more than ten years. Others had been migrating for more than two decades (Fulendra and Surendra Jha, Yogendra and Upendra Saday).

In many of our case studies, migration was a second or third generation phenomenon within the same household. Lalji Kamat's father had been a salaried worker in the tea gardens of Cooch Behar. Lalji himself had been migrating for the last 15-20 years, and his sons, Santosh and Ravi, for 10 and 7-8 years respectively. Their two younger brothers Mukesh and Raju also started migrating a couple of years earlier, so in this household all the adult males, as well as two young boys migrated. Motilal Saday migrated for more than 15 years, and his son, Baleshwar had been going away for more than two decades. Chandrakishore Jha had been away from the village since 1977, and his son Mihir also migrated. Lalu Jha migrated for more than 15 years, though he settled back in the village long ago; now his son Chandramohan was away for work.

The following features stand out in the migration history of the two villages:

- First, migrants, whether they are short- or long-term, remain connected to their village by visiting regularly and sending remittances. In Mahisham, Chandrakishore Jha was

a sub-inspector in the Bihar police and had lived away from the village for more than three decades. Yet, he came back to the village every month, to take care of his family and his farm; “*khet aur ghar ki dekhrekh karne chale aate hain.*” Binod Mandal worked in a carpet firm in Panipat, but he came back about 3-4 times in a year and worked in the village during the harvesting of the paddy and wheat crops.

- The practice of sending remittances is near universal. The average annual remittance per migrant household was Rs. 20,138 in Chandkura and Rs. 25,930 in Mahisham in 2011.¹⁷ Average household incomes were considerably higher in households with migrant members (see section VII below). In Mahisham, in four of the 11 case study households where migration was reported, remittances were the main source of income. Mohammed Sabauddin sent back 5000 rupees every month, which sustained the other seven members of the household in the village. Similarly, Lalji Kamat’s household in the village was solely dependent on remittance income; Lalji sent back about 1500 rupees every month to his wife Moti, and sons Santosh and Ravi each sent about 2000 rupees to their wives every month. Mohammed Samsul sent 3000 rupees to his wife Asma every month. Chandramohan Jha sent 1000-1200 rupees to his wife Bibha every month and about 1000 rupees at the beginning of the agricultural season.
- Second, both push and pull factors were important, as well as their interaction. In Mahisham, the production system in the village did not provide sufficient work or food and people had little choice but to migrate. In Chandkura, the more advanced agricultural system may not have provided employment all year round, but it provided food security, and did not push people out of the village. But the prosperous and educated were ‘pulled’ to the city and their migration tended to be longer term. In both cases migration then influenced the pattern of development of the village, especially in Mahisham, with a process in which lack of local development led to migration, and the absence of most men of working age in turn reinforced underdevelopment.
- Third, through migration workers were able to diversify their occupations and improve their work status. The proportion of regular workers was higher among Chandkura migrants who had been able to access modern occupations such as professional and technical services, sales, modern health services and teaching. Though casual work dominates the migration stream from Mahisham, some of it linked to ‘old’ occupations such as agricultural work and personal services, here too there has been a fair amount of occupational mobility and migrants have been increasingly pulled towards urban centres and industries. The life histories of migrant workers revealed that it was common for migrants to work for a succession of employers in multiple destinations and in a variety of occupations.
- Fourth, the attitudes of young men towards migration were quite different in the two villages. In Chandkura, youth would migrate but many came back quickly, finding the work too hard and life as a migrant too harsh. In Mahisham, in contrast, young people shunned agricultural work and would not come back to the village even at peak agricultural

seasons to work in the fields like their fathers. This despite the evidence from our case studies that many migrants work in precarious or insalubrious conditions, commonly for 12 hour working days. In Chandkura villagers made it clear that they prefer to work locally if employment is available at decent wages, and the employment opportunities that have developed within commuting distance from Chandkura have certainly contributed to its lower level of migration. In Mahisham, in the absence of such local employment opportunities migration had become the unquestioned norm.

To sum up: Migration of the type we observe in these villages allows households to diversify their livelihood strategies, with one foot in the village and another foot in the city. Income from migration and remittances significantly contributes to consumption smoothing at the household level, permits the purchase of an expanded basket of goods and no doubt, stimulates the local economy. The 'male' nature of migration leads to women, children and the elderly being left behind in the village. This results in a bi-locational residence of migrant households, and generates a flow of remittances. These features are all more pronounced in the case of Mahisham, where migration is a way of life.

VII. LIVING STANDARDS AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Today, average incomes are similar in the two villages, but the sources of income are quite different, because of the larger numbers of migrants in Mahisham. Including the income earned by migrants, average (mean) household income in Mahisham was about 9 per cent higher than in Chandkura in 2010-11 (Rs 97,667 per annum against 89,470); excluding migrants it was about 37 per cent lower (Rs 36,438 against 57,465). A third way of measuring income is to count not the total incomes of migrants, but the cash that they remit or bring back to the village. In both villages migrants send or bring back about one third of their income, giving an average household income in Chandkura of Rs 66,655, about 18 per cent higher than Mahisham (Rs 56,533). Remittances accounted for more than a third of household income in Mahisham but only 14 per cent in Chandkura.

Apart from migration, it might be thought that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme would have a visible impact on incomes. However, in practice NREGA is of little consequence in Bihar and it was hardly mentioned by respondents in case study households. 2009 survey data do nevertheless suggest that there would have been some impact of NREGA in that year in Chandkura, where 19 per cent of households reported some (male) NREGA employment, averaging 27 days work. In Mahisham only 5 per cent of households reported male NREGA work in 2009, for an average of only 11 days. For women NREGA employment was negligible.¹⁸ On the other hand, pensions, transfers through the PDS, and other government transfers were a significant component of income, especially in Chandkura.

The above figures refer to income per household, but household size was larger in Mahisham than in Chandkura. As a result the mean income per capita in Chandkura (Rs 15,604 including migrants and their incomes) was larger than in Mahisham (Rs 14,175), the reverse of the case for household income. This average can be compared with the Tendulkar poverty line for rural Bihar, which was Rs 655.60 per month for 2009-10. Adjusting for

approximately 8 per cent inflation, this would give Rs 8500 per capita per year as the poverty line for 2010-11. Some 39 per cent of households fell below this poverty line in Mahisham, and 40 per cent in Chandkura. So not only was total income similar in the two villages, but also the incidence of poverty. Households with migrants did better – 36 per cent below the poverty line in Mahisham, and only 18 per cent in Chandkura.

How have these incomes changed over time? We do not have good income estimates for 1981-2 or 1998-9, and so cannot measure the change with any precision, but it is clear that incomes have risen sharply. For agricultural labour households at least this is clear from the rise in real daily wages. Incomes may well have increased more than wages, because employment levels have probably increased as well. That would suggest a rise in real incomes of agricultural labourers of three times or more in Chandkura, and double or more in Mahisham – to which has to be added the income from non-agricultural work, either locally or through circular migration. Among cultivating households the rise in income has probably been less, especially if they have not benefitted from migration. Yields of the main crops, as noted in section II, may have risen by about 50 per cent in Mahisham, and somewhat more in Chandkura, where agricultural diversification has also added to the income of cultivators. Here too one has to take account of increased income from non-agricultural activities. On the other hand, population has increased as well, though not enough to offset the overall increase in income.

While measuring change in incomes is fraught with difficulties, changes in consumption are easier to appreciate. In fact, one of the most tangible changes over the last 30 years has been an increase in food consumption. In both Mahisham and Chandkura, this was the most frequent response to a question about what has changed in people's lives. This was especially true in Mahisham, where respondents often reported that thirty years ago, one meal a day was the norm, and hunger was a constant a part of everyday life, especially in the poor households and communities. This came out in almost all the case studies. At Narayan Yadav and Malik Thakur's homes we heard that thirty years ago, they ate only one meal a day. Motilal Saday said, "*Tees saal pehle, ek shaam khaate the, ek shaam bhookhe ya upwaas rakte the. Abhi, nasta, din mein bhojan aur raat mein bhojan karte the*" (Thirty years ago, we ate one evening, and stayed hungry or fasted the next evening. Now, we have breakfast, lunch during the day, and dinner at night). At Binod Mandal's house, we were told, "*Pehle anaaj ginkar khana padta tha, ab ginana nahin padta*" (Earlier we counted grains and ate; not any more). Today, the households have two to three meals a day, and food scarcity, even in the lean agricultural seasons, is not heard of.

Similar sentiments were expressed in Chandkura, especially in labour households. Chotan Mochi, whose father was an attached labourer in 1981, recollected that earlier food was short but now it was sufficient and his family ate well ("*ab poora hai... sab badhiya se khaate hain*"). Another former attached labourer, Baldev Ravidas, commented that bonded labourers did not get enough food, while Sibu Paswan, a casual agricultural labourer, said that earlier they ate only once a day but now they have enough. Interestingly, the practice of having two meals a day continues in Chandkura; most of the households said that they

skip breakfast, having only lunch and dinner. This is in contrast to Mahisham, where in our cases studies three meals a day were generally reported.

There has also been some change in the food basket. In 1981, consumption of millets such as marua and inferior pulses such as khesari was common, especially in agricultural labour households. Today, in all households rice and wheat predominate. In the 1981 survey, it was found that vegetables were consumed on average four days a week and pulses two days in both villages, but among agricultural labour households only two days per week for vegetables and one day for pulses. In our case study households in 2012 vegetables were consumed almost every day, and pulses several times in a week, and this did not vary much between caste and class groups. So there has clearly been a qualitative change in the diet, especially for lower income groups. Milk is today generally consumed if the household owns milch animals, or has young children; in 1981 it was only consumed on one day per month, on average, among agricultural labour households. Moti Devi, Lalji Kamat's wife in Mahisham, said that "we buy milk for our grandchildren, but we did not buy milk for our children". This of course reflects remittances from migrant workers – households with migrant members and especially the immediate families of migrants consumed a superior food basket compared with others. But other changes were more limited. Consumption of fruits depends on seasonal availability and eggs and meat are seldom consumed; fish used to be common in the season in Mahisham, but may have declined. So there are limits to the improvement in the diet. But there have been notable gains in food quality and diversity for poorer households, particularly with respect to the consumption of vegetables and pulses.

On the whole, the memory of hunger and food shortage was stronger in Mahisham than in Chandkura, but this is not really supported by our survey results from 1981-82. In that year, in Mahisham households consumed just 98 per cent of recommended calorie intakes, on average, but in Chandkura the figure was even lower at 81 per cent.¹⁹ 56 per cent of households in Mahisham and 78 per cent in Chandkura fell below recommended calorie intakes. This suggests that Chandkura was worse off than Mahisham at that time. But there was a lot of year to year fluctuation in the 1980s, and 1981 might have been an unusually bad year in Chandkura, or unusually good in Mahisham; other indicators suggested Mahisham was probably worse off than Chandkura in the longer term. For instance there was a higher percentage of stunted children in Mahisham in 1981, a strong indicator of long term nutritional deficiency; a higher proportion of children had died in Mahisham (26 per cent against 16 per cent); and non-food expenditure was higher in Chandkura. In any case, for both villages the improvement in food intake over the past 30 years is visible and is widely seen as a major aspect of progress.

Increasing income, whether from migration or from local development, is sufficient to explain the substantial improvement in food consumption in these villages, but the Public Distribution System (PDS) may also play some role. While access to rice and grain through the PDS is erratic and reaches only a fraction of the population entitled to these benefits, it could still be an important factor in improved food consumption. Our survey showed that BPL (below poverty line) households in practice had little access to their entitlement to

PDS grain. The system is notorious for its inefficiencies and corruption, and the manager of one of the PDS shops in Mahisham explained graphically the difficulties he faced because of the lack of availability of grain in the government godowns. However, for the poorer Antyodaya population the system works better, and in Chandkura, where 33 per cent of households fell in this category, the majority reported obtaining most of their entitlement to subsidized grain. In Mahisham, where only 16 per cent of the population was categorized as Antyodaya²⁰, the amount of grain obtained was less, but still fairly substantial, 18 kg in the reference month against 24 kg in Chandkura. This is certainly a factor in increased food consumption, but apparently not decisive, firstly because the perception of improvement extends far beyond the categories of population obtaining PDS grain, and secondly because the sense of improvement is greater in Mahisham, whereas availability of PDS grain is greater in Chandkura.

Clothing is another important dimension of living standards that has substantially improved, especially among the poor. Earlier women from poorer households had to do with one sari, without any blouse. In the women's survey in 1981, about 20 per cent of women had only one sari and only one third of women in the entire sample had more than two. Now, women own more saris and wearing a blouse is the norm, even in poor families. It appears that migrant members own more clothes and dress better, and wives of migrants own more saris. One of our case studies from Mahisham, Dharmvir Paswan, who had spent much time outside the village in trading activities, was dressed in a much more sophisticated way than others in the village, with a Nike cap. His wife, Nibha Devi, wore ornamental jewellery and owned 7-8 saris.

While there is a tendency to pay more attention to the clothing needs of women, men too are affected by (the lack of) clothing. Being able to buy clothes was one of the most significant changes over the last 30 years reported by both men and women. Chotan Mochi said that his family now owned more clothes, compared to 30 years ago. Motilal Saday from Mahisham said that, "*Kapde ki bahut killat thi. Kapde ke bina baahar jaana accha nahin lagta tha. Ab koi pareshani nahin hai*"; earlier, when clothing was inadequate, and he had no clothes for his upper body, he felt uneasy and humiliated when he had to leave his house bare-chested. We find that ownership of better clothes is associated with a sense of respect and dignity for both men and women. But the arrival of more Westernized clothes in the village may be a mixed blessing. Surendra Jha, in Mahisham, said that nowadays people wear fashionable clothes, but they are more expensive. And it is certainly true that trousers, shirts and blouses all require much more tailoring than traditional dress.

We did not try to collect other expenditure information systematically, but there is evidence of an increasing importance of health expenditures – always a priority after food needs have been met – and, more recently education with the spread of private tuition. Section X below gives more information on household strategies and constraints with respect to health costs. Energy costs are also significant; kerosene is widely available through the PDS, but electricity is erratic. Few rural households pay their official electricity bills, but the demand for electricity generates a private market, in both Mahisham (where it operates on a fairly

large scale) and Chandkura. And mobile phones are of course a significant expenditure, although running costs are modest because of the low pricing policies. Migrant workers have additional expenses, especially for travel and lodging, but they are set against higher incomes. In fact, apart from food, clothing, fuel and medical expenses, along with the costs of building or maintaining housing, other expenditures are modest in low income households in the two villages. There are much larger exceptional expenditures, for marriages, funerals and other social obligations; and debt repayment continues to be an issue with interest rates of 5 per cent per month. It is striking that these latter comments could have been made 30 years ago; rising incomes have brought some new elements, but do not yet seem to have transformed consumption patterns.

VIII. THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AND GENDER RELATIONS

Migration does not only impact on incomes. It also has a series of other effects on the social, demographic and economic patterns of each village.

1. Household structure

Household structures and living arrangements are complex in both the villages. While there is a general shift from joint to nuclear families, this process is anything but linear. The definition of the household in our surveys (as is commonly followed in social science research in India²¹) is based on the sharing of a common kitchen where all members of the household eat food cooked therein. At the outset, this appears fairly simple, but there are many mechanisms by which households bundle and unbundle themselves. Living arrangements are particularly complex, and there are various permutations and combinations of sharing living spaces and cooking spaces. Often, men and women report these differently. Take the case of Sibu Paswan of Chandkura. Sibu said that there was one chulha in the house, but a discussion with his daughter-in-law, Nirjala and granddaughter-in-law, Babita revealed that there were two chulhas, and each woman cooked separately. Their house site was divided into four distinct parts – an open semi-pucca structure outside the house compound (an open shed that has two brick walls and two open sides with brick pillars supporting a straw roof), where Sibu (and the buffalo) slept; a kaccha structure where his granddaughter was staying; another kaccha room, where Nirjala and his son Indra lived, and a pucca room, at the far end of the compound, where his grandson Bhola and Babita stayed. Similarly, in the case study of Lalji Kamat of Mahisham, the physical structure of the house was distinctly divided in two units – a kaccha and a pucca structure. His two daughters-in-law, Renu and Anita, lived in pucca rooms; his wife Moti lived in a kaccha room. This arrangement prevailed when the respective ‘migrant’ husbands visited the village. It is thus not unusual for several brothers to share a house site, with their wives, children and parents, with varying degrees of ownership, access and use of household assets such as the rooms of the house, the courtyard, drinking water, agricultural land, vegetable garden, orchard etc. Household members also had differential access to various goods and resources such as food, mosquito nets and

mobile phones, among others. In our case studies, younger members mostly had greater access to the material resources, and the older members of the household were vulnerable.

Migration plays an important role in differentiating access to household resources. Those who migrate tend to be economically better off than those who don't, within the household. Migrant men usually send remittances, not to the household as a whole, but to individual members, be it their parents or wives. Consumption patterns tend to vary between household members who have access to remittances, and those who don't. This contrast was apparent in the case study of two brothers in Mahisham, Fulendra and Surendra Jha. Fulendra was a migrant who worked in Delhi, and Surendra Jha, an ex-migrant who resided in the village. Fulendra's wife Hira and their children lived in the pucca part of house; Surendra, his wife Indu and their children in the kaccha part. There was an electric connection for one bulb that lit Hira's room but also the courtyard. The women cooked in separate chulhas; both cooked pulses 3-4 times in a week, Hira cooked vegetables about 3-4 times a week, but Indu only once or twice a week. In addition, Hira purchased half a kilo of milk every week, while Indu did not.

It appears that migration triggers the splitting or recomposition of households, and migrant members break away, in whole or in part. This was more apparent in Mahisham than Chandkura, as migration is more pervasive in that village. This could be seen in Lalji Kamat's household. Remittances from migration facilitated the splitting of the household and one chulha gave way to three chulhas, according to his wife Moti Devi. Both of his daughters-in-law, Ruby Devi and Anita Devi, said that when they cooked at the same chulha they quarrelled more; separate chulhas led to better relations. Like in the Jha household discussed above, the three women cooked different food items, and they cooked separately. Anita did not cook pulses; Moti and Ruby prepared them twice and four times a week respectively. Ruby cooked vegetables about 4-5 times a week; Moti and Anita cooked them every day. Milk was bought only by Anita, and not by Moti or Ruby. But there remained some elements of sharing. While they each had a separate household budget, food was generally purchased together. They also shared delicacies such as fish, which was cooked about once a week, and meat, cooked (by men) once in two months.

2. Impact of male migration on gender relations

Living in the absence of their men is a way of life for women in rural Bihar. Outmigration of men has effects on women's work and their lives, within and outside the household. In both Chandkura and Mahisham, women did more tasks after the outmigration of men than they did earlier (see section IV). These include household decision-making, managing money and agricultural tasks. However, in each village, the differences in the nature and characteristics of male migration had a differential impact on women, and on gender relations.

In the last section we saw that migration is far more widespread and entrenched in Mahisham than in Chandkura. In Mahisham, remittances from migration generally reached women's hands; this was not found in Chandkura. Remittances, which the women manage and spend, are instrumental in increasing their mobility. In Mahisham women went to the local

market in Madhepur, about two kilometres away from the main village tola, and purchased goods and goodies. This is quite in contrast with the women in Chandkura, whose mobility was very limited. Women in our case studies rarely visited the local market in Hilsa town, 5 kilometres away. This may be attributed to a variety of reasons. First, men migrated in smaller numbers and many commuted daily to work outside the village, so that women were not compelled to go out for regular errands or to make purchases. Second, wages were still paid in kind, many of the daily necessities were «purchased» through barter inside the village, and consequently there was less demand for ‘market’ goods.

To conclude, it seems that in Mahisham outmigration of men has compelled women to undertake work within and outside the realm of their homes and to make spending decisions; this has contributed to women’s agency as well as increased mobility, and, one can reasonably argue, led to some progress towards equality in gender relations. In Chandkura, women have little access to money in a relatively closed agrarian village economy and a perverse kind of a barter system works to their disadvantage. Women’s mobility is much less, and on the whole gender relations much more conservative.

IX. SOCIAL MOBILITY

One of the advantages of a long-term perspective is that it permits one to follow the changing situations of individual communities and households. Within the general tendency for living standards to improve over the last 30 years there is of course a good deal of variation in the fortunes of individual households as they pass through the life cycle, with periods of high and low dependency. But there can also be more fundamental changes in the position of households or communities in the economic, social or political hierarchy. There is an element of chance in these changes, as families benefit from windfall gains or face particular difficulties (the latter we discuss in the next section). But they can also reflect deliberate strategies for social and economic mobility. In Chandkura and Mahisham we can consider two types of strategy: migration to other labour markets; and investment in education. But first we need to consider the implications for social mobility of the transformation of the agrarian system.

1. Agrarian structure and social mobility

The demise of the old semi-feudal production relations transformed the situations of both landlords and labourers. In Chandkura, households that were attached labour only twenty years ago, such as those of Baldev Ravidas or Chotan Mochi, are now engaged in a much wider labour market with higher wages. This has led to considerable changes between generations. Shivaji Prasad’s father was an attached labourer in 1981; when he first started work he was a casual wage labourer; but for the last ten years he has been a sharecropper, leasing in land. Chotan Mochi too reported that in some years he now got some land for sharecropping. In Mahisham, in the Musahar tola, there was a similar pattern, with households that previously worked for wages in agriculture or on migration acquiring land, owned or leased, or going into self-employment.

Alongside the end of semi-feudal production relations, the jajmani system of annual payments for particular services has almost disappeared in Chandkura and declined in Mahisham. One important consequence of this change is that it loosens the tie between caste and occupation. Dharmvir Sharma, a carpenter by caste occupation in Chandkura, was still doing some carpentry work outside the village but no longer practised his caste occupation of making and repairing wooden ploughs and other agricultural implements, largely of course because these have been replaced by metal ploughs and power tillers, but also because the jajmani system implied continuing obligations and paid less than wages available elsewhere. In Mahisham too, jajmani payments have disappeared for carpenters (for the same reason), though they have survived for some other occupations. For instance, some barbers (Nai) were still paid in grain at the rate of 20 kg per year per adult male. In 1981 jajmani was very widespread, especially in Chandkura, where 96 per cent of payments for a carpenter, 73 per cent for a dhobi, 80 per cent for a barber and 52 per cent for a potter were made under this system.

In Mahisham the counterpart to the improving situation of labour households is some sign of downward mobility among Brahmin or richer Muslim households, associated with loss of land and a lack of investment in agriculture. But in Chandkura, the dominant Kurmi group has, as we have seen, maintained its position through capital accumulation and innovation in a more dynamic agriculture. This should be seen in the context of the rise of the middle castes to economic and political power across the State.

2. Connections between geographical and social mobility

Earlier sections demonstrate the importance of migration for work in improving living standards. But beyond the substantial impact on incomes, there are other effects on social mobility.

The first is the way in which migration enhances and diversifies skills. One of the most fascinating (and little documented) aspects of migration is the variety of types of work in different occupations undertaken by the same person, often in many different places. The occupational mobility of migrant workers is as striking as their geographical mobility. For instance, at the age of 10-12 years, Yogendra Saday, a Musahar from Mahisham, went with his maternal uncle to Meerut and worked there as a casual wage labourer in construction for a year. Five years later he migrated again, this time, to Bhiwandi, near Mumbai, with his brother-in-law, and worked as a sweeper at a weaving mill. Gradually, he learnt how to operate the power mill, and became an operator at the same mill for ten years. Later, he worked in Delhi, as small trader, and in Chandigarh and Mohali (where he ran a teashop). He returned to live in the village after falling ill in 2004. Baleshwar Saday, another migrant from Mahisham, first went to Punjab and worked as agricultural labourer in Sangrur. He then learnt the trade of plumbing, worked for wages as a plumber in Patiala for 6-7 years, and then in Chandigarh for 10 years. In 2012 he had been working as a plumber in Ambala for some four years, both as an own account worker (when he organized some wage labourers and found business) and as a daily wage labourer. Lalji Kamat had been working as a coolie

in Lucknow for the previous 2-3 years. In the past, he worked as a carpet cleaner in Bhadohi (5 years) and an agricultural labourer in Punjab and Haryana (10+ years). His sons Santosh and Ravi went to Bhadohi to work in the carpet industry, and later migrated to Mumbai, where both were selling tea and also working as casual labourers.

Much of this work is unskilled, and not all skills can be applied in the village. But the diversity of experience alone widens capabilities and opens up opportunities. So some migrants return and set up small businesses. Yogendra Saday was now running a furniture making business and a grocery shop in the village; he said that while migrating he learned how to sell things.

A second way in which migration can lead to social mobility is if the additional income is invested. In fact, most remittances are used for current expenses, but some investment was reported. Binod Mandal's brother bought 1.5 bighas of land, and some of those who sold land, such as Surendra Jha, reported that Musahars were among the buyers. Given that village wages are very low in relation to the high cost of land, income from migration was almost certainly involved. In some migrant households there has been purchase of livestock, and it is common for households with migrants to spend on improving their housing. Dharmvir Paswan, one of the few migrants from Chandkura among our case studies, was building a house in the village.

We have already noted that in both villages, the highest migration rates were found among the landless agricultural labour households and non-agricultural households, and the lowest rates found among medium and large peasants. One result is some flattening of the income distribution, for landless agricultural labour households had incomes that are not much lower than the village average – 27 per cent lower in Mahisham in 2011. The pattern was not greatly different in Chandkura (23 per cent lower), so the same result can clearly be achieved through commuting to local labour markets as well as through long distance migration. Migration was also used as a strategy among the upper social echelons of the village, but in a rather different way, often connected with access to regular public sector jobs, business or education. While we have no direct information, it seems likely that, as a result, these upper groups have been able to maintain their income advantage within the village, while the gap between agricultural labourers and smaller cultivators has been reduced.

Perhaps more than anything else, the fact that migration provides alternative opportunities strengthens the economic and political power of agricultural labour classes in the village, and rebalances the system away from the extremes of exploitation observed thirty years ago.

3. Education

The second important route to social mobility is of course education. Already in 1981 there were primary schools in both villages and a middle school in Mahisham, but in the last decade there has been a considerable expansion of educational facilities and enrolment. In 2009 Mahisham had 3 co-educational government primary schools, a government middle school and a madarsa. The nearest government high secondary school and college were respectively 2.5 and 3.5 kms away. It was reported that there were 25 private schools in Madhepur. An

adult literacy programme was also running in which some women participated. In Chandkura there was a co-educational government middle school in the village. The nearest higher secondary school was 3 kms away and various colleges in Hilsa five kilometres away. There were also private educational facilities in Hilsa.

Educational attainment gradually increased over the past decades but an acceleration occurred more recently, as can be seen in the much higher literacy rates among young people below 25 years of age (table 7). This was true for both men and women, but the improvement for women was particularly spectacular. As the table shows, literacy rates for women were very low in 1981, even for the 7 to 24 age groups, and they were much lower in Mahisham than in Chandkura. By 2009 in Mahisham more girls than boys aged less than 15 were attending school regularly, and literacy rates of boys and girls were similar in this age group. The rise in literacy among school age girls, from 19 per cent to 81 in 2009, is particularly spectacular. How recent this is can be seen in the average literacy rates over age 25, which were still only 21 per cent for women in 2009. In fact, Mahisham has made faster progress towards gender equality than Chandkura, where boys still have an advantage, though the difference has been greatly reduced here too.

Table 7
Percentage literate by age and sex: 2009 and (in brackets) 1981

	<i>Mahisham</i>		<i>Chandkura</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Age group 7-14	82 (43)	81 (19)	93 (57)	78 (42)
Age group 15-24	68 (39)	54 (19)	90 (67)	60 (28)
15 and above	59	40	76	37
25 and above	48 (35)	21 (8)	69 (50)	27 (19)
30 and above	45	20	71	25
40 and above	40	14	71	19
50 and above	44	11	61	19
60 and above	34	4	56	18

Note: Literacy in 1981 is defined as any schooling. Literacy in 2009 is defined as at least two years schooling, so is not strictly comparable. Literacy is of course a complex issue, so these are just elementary indicators.

Source: IHD Bihar Household survey 2009-10; ANSISS-ILO Bihar Survey 1981-2.

The net result is that among the population aged 15 and above a higher proportion of men were literate in Chandkura than in Mahisham (76 per cent in Chandkura against 59 per cent in Mahisham) but the reverse was true for women (40 per cent in Mahisham against 37 per cent in Chandkura) (Table 7). Hence the literacy gender gap was wider in Chandkura (39 percentage points) than in Mahisham (19 percentage points), which could be taken as an indicator of the status of women within their respective villages. The high incidence of male migration in Mahisham might have also encouraged families to increasingly send girls to school, since women have to assume more responsibilities within their household.

On the other hand, Chandkura showed an overall regular attendance rate that was higher than Mahisham for both boys (91 per cent against 72) and girls (85 per cent against 77). Among children aged 6 to 14 who went to school, 13 per cent did not attend school regularly

in Mahisham; they would drop out at peak agricultural seasons or girls would look after their siblings and perform domestic chores while their mothers were working. In Chandkura all enrolled children were said to attend school regularly.

Two factors have boosted school attendance: i) education is increasingly valued and viewed as a means of social mobility and ii) government programmes provide free midday meals, free school books, school uniforms and free bicycles for youths who completed class 8 and enrol in class 9. Awareness of these programmes was high, and they clearly influence behaviour.

According to Chotan Mochi, previously poverty was the main reason for not enrolling his children in school. His eldest daughter did not go to school because she had the responsibility of her siblings and housework while her parents were going out to work. "Wage work was more important than education for the family livelihood. Nowadays, the Government provides many educational facilities for Scheduled Caste pupils and parents have become aware of the importance of education, therefore they are sending their children to school." His son, Ranjan, migrated for work after failing the matriculation examination in 2006. But after returning to agricultural work in the village he decided to study again for the examination. He took some private tuition, spending Rs 250 a month with the support of his father; he was waiting for his results at the time of our visit. Clearly there is a belief that education is a route out of agricultural labour. A similar case was found among the grandsons of Motilal Saday, a Musahar from Mahisham, who also returned from migration and went back to school.

In both villages, the vast majority of children went to a government school, 93 per cent in Mahisham and 87 per cent in Chandkura. In Mahisham, with a large Muslim population, 21 per cent of Muslim boys went to a madarsa. Otherwise private schooling concerned less than 5 per cent of children in Mahisham, but 13 per cent in Chandkura. As expected the incidence of private schooling was higher for boys and among upper social groups. Why do people send their children to private school? A mother from a Brahmin household in Mahisham, who had invested much in her children's education, said «What would teachers teach in government schools, they are always cooking!» referring to the fact that teachers often had to help in the preparation of the midday lunch. But cost remained the main determinant of the choice of school. Lalu Jha's eldest grandson used to go to a private school in Delhi where his father works but the family could no longer afford it. He was transferred to a government school there and his younger brother was enrolled in the government school in Mahisham.

Families are ready to take loans or sell land to pay for their children's education. Chandrakishore and Chandrashekhar Jha sold 7 kathas of land for this purpose. Chandrashekhar Jha's daughter Priyanka, who was 18 years old and a class 11 student, was studying science and wanted to become a doctor. Her mother had completed class 10; she had never worked outside her home but she wanted her daughter to have a career. Chandrashekhar said, perhaps a little rhetorically, that if necessary he would sell his house to pay for his daughter's education.

Raj Kumar Jha, another Brahmin landowner from Mahisham, needed 3.4 lakh for the registration of his son in college in Pune, but the bank manager refused him a loan.

Subsequently he enrolled his son in Patna. This time he needed 1.04 lakh rupees, which he obtained from his bank in 2007. In 2012 his debt had increased to Rs 2.31 lakh with the accumulation of interest and he had not repaid it yet.

In Mohammed Salauddin's household, also from Mahisham, the most educated person was his brother, who had completed a degree and was teaching mathematics in Delhi. His remittances not only covered the living cost of the family but also paid for the education of his two sisters. «Education gave high returns!»

When we asked in our case study households about the changes over the last thirty years, improvement in education was frequently mentioned, in particular the different government schemes to encourage schooling and the higher enrolment of girls. Nevertheless the quality of state education remains in question and private tuition was flourishing.

The above stories show that education has become a focus for all social groups rich or poor. People are ready to work hard, to take loans or to sell assets to support their children's education. But question marks must remain. Expectations are high, but few jobs are being created that can take advantage of the rapidly increasing education levels of a growing population. There is little sign in the case studies that past investment in education has been successful as a strategy for social mobility; it was the rich who could afford to invest in the education of their children, so education merely stabilized the existing hierarchy. With a much larger fraction of young people completing secondary schooling and beyond, competition for the better jobs will be fierce, and the upper classes in both villages are investing at a higher level, essentially outside the village, to ensure that their offspring have the best chance.

X. FACING CRISIS

Living standards have risen over the last 30 years but the fate of individual households can also be affected by external events, the family life cycle or sudden needs. In this section we review some of the consequences of natural calamities and accidents, adverse health conditions and the constraints of social obligations.

1. Natural calamities and accidents

We have already noted that Bihar suffers from the vagaries of the weather, North Bihar being particularly vulnerable to floods and South Bihar to drought. In 2009 we asked in our two villages whether any floods or drought had occurred in the course of the five years previous to the survey.

Chandkura had been affected by both flood and drought. It was reported that the flood had damaged half of the crop that had been planted and had also damaged the kaccha road. The effects of the drought were more drastic as it was estimated that 70 per cent of the Aghani crop had been lost or damaged, which had severely reduced employment. Mahisham had also experienced devastating floods one year: 90 per cent of the Aghani crops were lost or damaged, 10 per cent of the houses were damaged or destroyed, 2 per cent of the animals were lost, and the pucca road was damaged as well as one third of the kaccha roads. In both villages there were severe effects on welfare, with the poorest being hit the hardest as they

had less assets or savings to cushion blows such as loss of employment or dwellings. The response included a search for employment and income outside the village, and in particular an increase in migration.

Accidents also affect the fate of families. One of Mohammed Salauddin's brothers lost his life during a flood in 2004. He was washed away in front of his brothers while they were inspecting the extent of the floods. Bhajan Mistry died in a road accident on his way back home after leaving his workplace in Hilsa. Both were breadwinners and their premature death had an impact on the family income. In the latter case it prompted the joint family to split up into three nuclear units, and Bhajan Mistry's widow started to work as a casual agricultural labourer to support herself and her two daughters, which she had never done while her husband was alive.

2. Health hazards

In Mahisham 63 per cent of the families thought their health situation had improved in the course of the previous ten years while 26 per cent thought it had deteriorated and 10 per cent thought it had remained the same. In Chandkura the corresponding figures were 59 per cent, 27 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. The groups who perceived most improvement were OBC-II in Chandkura and Muslims in Mahisham. The groups who perceived most deterioration were Scheduled Castes in Chandkura and upper castes in Mahisham. Although in both villages a majority felt that health status had improved, perceptions of changes in health were distinctly less positive than for economic indicators such as employment or income, where almost everyone considered that there had been progress.

Ill health and major illnesses are always a setback for a family, whether rich or poor. On the one hand, they affect work capabilities, reducing the household's earning potential. On the other hand, illnesses often lead to extraordinary expenses that can only be met by selling off family assets or going into debt.

The most common ailments reported in Mahisham were cold, fever, diarrhoea, asthma, malaria and kala-azar and skin diseases. But in addition a number of migrant workers returned to the village because of ill health, often the result of the hard work, long working hours and insalubrious working and living conditions common among migrants. Mohammed Salauddin had to undergo stomach surgery that he connected to his work in a cramped position doing embroidery in Delhi. Surendra Jha contracted tuberculosis while working in Vapi in a textile factory with 5000 workers and was still not fit to work at the time of our visit.

The most common illnesses reported in Chandkura were: influenza, cold/cough/pneumonia, diarrhoea, and among women jaundice and anaemia. Malaria was also present. Cataract, hydrocele, paralysis, piles and infertility were other health problems found among the case studies. Health was a constant concern.

Whom do villagers consult for their health problems? Both Chandkura and Mahisham have a Primary Health Sub-Centre (PHSC) but neither meets the villagers' expectations. In Chandkura most people said that they first consult a village quack, reputed to be approachable and willing to provide credit. For more serious illnesses they went to the PHC three kilometres

away (with a nurse and midwife but no doctor) and bought medicines privately, or they went to private facilities in Hilsa and eventually Patna. In the past, people from Mahisham also tended to consult one of the village quacks first or to buy medicines from the nearest medicine shop. If the symptoms persisted they went to a private physician in Madhepur or Jhanjharpur (16 km away). The village PHSC had, and still has, a bad reputation but, in contrast, in 2012 the Madhepur PHC has improved greatly. At the time of our visit a doctor had been in residence for the last two years and current medicines were available, which had not been the case previously. An increasing number of people would first consult the PHC, though some continued to go to a private doctor. For more serious health conditions people would go to Darbhanga (40 km away) to either public or private facilities.

The populations of both villages expressed a marked preference for private health facilities if they could afford it or were faced with more serious illnesses. There was a general belief that care was better in private facilities. A private doctor's consultation cost Rs 100 in Madhepur while at the PHC treatment was free, although the wait was long (one might wait 3-4 hours before seeing the doctor) and many medicines had to be purchased privately. Rabia Khatun, who was 60 years old and diabetic, stated that "the public hospital in Darbhanga does not have medicines for diabetes and the wait is too long." She went to the private practice of a government doctor in Darbhanga (Rs 150 per consultation) to be prescribed her daily treatment.

In order to cover the medical expenses of major illnesses households were compelled either to borrow money or to sell land. In Mahisham, Mohammed Salauddin's father suffered from and eventually died of a heart ailment; the family sold 4-5 kathas of land for his treatment. Chandrasekhar Jha's father suffered from liver cancer and 16 kathas of land were sold to cover the medical expenses, which amounted to 1.5-1.75 lakh rupees. Raj Kumar Thakur took a loan of Rs 10,000 (at 5 per cent interest per month) to cover gallstone surgery that cost him Rs 20,000 in a private hospital in Darbhanga. Samsul's wife said that they had borrowed one lakh rupees from four different moneylenders (also at 5 per cent interest rate per month) when their daughter Rizwana fell ill, suffering from recurrent headaches and weakness. When Dasani Devi's 6-year old son had kala-azar he was treated for free at the public hospital in Madhubani but medicines had to be bought privately and she had to borrow Rs 5,000 from one of her employers. In Chandkura, Baldev Ravidas borrowed money from different sources for treatment of his paralysis. For one loan he pawned a gold chain to a goldsmith in Hilsa against 2000 rupees.²² He came back home before recovery because the money ran out. Ramvir Sharma stayed a week in a private hospital in Bakhtiyarpur for a hydrocele operation. He borrowed 15,000 rupees without interest from his brother-in-law for his treatment. These examples show that loans are frequent and that, including the accumulation of interest, they can be very large in relation to income, especially in the case of labourers.

3. Social obligations

Expenses incurred for funeral ceremonies (Sradh) and weddings have been increasing along with standards of living. We did not get direct information on funerals but we did gather

some on dowry. Though the payment of dowry was prohibited in 1961 under Indian civil law, the practice has continued and even spread. It is accepted as part and parcel of social life that concerns all castes, economic strata, Hindus and non-Hindus alike.

Dowry was widespread even in 1981 – almost half of married women interviewed at that time reported that dowry had been paid. The value of dowry has increased substantially over the years, it being considered a sign of economic and material progress, and this was observed in both Mahisham and Chandkura. Dowry increases as one moves up the caste and class hierarchy, and it is not unusual for families to sell land or take loans at exorbitant rates to meet the cost.

The wealthiest household among our case studies in Mahisham had hosted two marriages in the last couple of years. Raj Kumar Jha paid 10 lakh rupees as dowry for his daughter's marriage in 2011, and his brother, Saroj Kumar Jha paid 11 lakh rupees for his daughter's wedding. In Raj Kumar's case, jewellery was provided in addition to cash. He had to borrow 8 lakh rupees from his brothers to pay for the dowry.

It appears that the sale of land to finance dowry has been prevalent in Mahisham for a long time. Ugant Lal Jha sold land at the time of his daughters' weddings long ago, and more recently at the time of his granddaughter's wedding. Of the 5 acres of land that Ugant Lal inherited, almost four acres were sold to provide for these dowry payments. In the case of Mohammed Salauddin's sister Shyista's marriage, the family sold 30 kathas of land in 2004 to pay for the dowry. But the marriage broke down as an additional dowry demand for a motorcycle and Rs 1,00,000 in cash could not be met, and Shyista had to return back home.

Lately, motorcycles have become a common dowry demand among the better off. Malik Thakur's son Jaykumar received one as part of his dowry. His elder brother Rajkumar complained that he would have liked one too, but in his time, motorcycles were generally not given.

In Chandkura too, the practice of dowry is widespread, and this was articulated widely in the discussions during our case studies. Baldev Ravidas lamented, "*dahejya nahin chodta*"; dowry does not leave us. He had paid 2000 rupees for his elder daughter's wedding and 5000 rupees for his younger daughter's wedding (they were married in the 1990s). Sibu Paswan's family received 10,000 rupees for his grandson Bhola's wedding. Bhajan Mistry's family received 1200 rupees for the elder son Dharmvir's wedding and 4000 rupees for younger son Ramvir. Chotan Mochi had paid 7000 rupees and given household utensils for his daughter Ranju's wedding in 1999. He was to receive 15,000 rupees for his son Ranjan's wedding, planned for April 2012. In the relatively better off household of Jitendra Saw, 35,000 rupees were received for elder son Raju's wedding, and 70,000 rupees for the younger son, Abhimanyu (both married in the 2000s some four to five years apart, giving some idea of dowry inflation). Their mother Parmila Devi complained that this was not enough, that she was not satisfied with the dowry received in her sons' weddings.

While the practice of dowry prevails in both the villages, there are some dissimilarities. The means of provision of dowry are radically different. In Mahisham, landowners frequently resort to land sale to raise money for dowry, perhaps reflecting the detachment from cultivation

of the old elite. In Chandkura, where the capital value of and returns to land are much higher than in Mahisham, cultivators are reluctant to sell. In fact, in this village we did not come across any cases of sale of land to raise money for dowry, even in wealthy households.

* * *

A particular mention should be made of Md Salauddin's household, hit by all three calamities in a single year, 2004 – accidental death of the eldest son in a flood, illness and death of the household head, and a failed and expensive marriage.²³ In previous times this had been a zamindari family. But they lost most of their remaining land facing up to these adverse events and would have been in great difficulty if Salauddin and his brother Sabauddin had not been working in Delhi at the time. But subsequently Salauddin had health problems and returned to the village, and after the debacle of Shyista's failed marriage none of her six brothers or sisters had married. Rabia Kathun, their mother, said that there was a lot of pressure on Sabauddin, who was now the sole breadwinner of the family. The future of the family was obviously precarious.

XI. CONCLUSION

These two villages, both on the Gangetic plain, and less than 150 km apart as the crow flies, are on different development paths. Although they were originally chosen to represent "backward" and "advanced" situations, in reality that is an oversimplification. The "backward" village certainly has less productive agriculture, but also higher average household income (including the income of migrants) than the "advanced" one. It may be more remote, with poorer road and rail connections, but it is also more closely integrated into the national labour market.

The story of the more advanced village, Chandkura, as it emerges from the successive surveys and the case studies, is in some sense a fairly conventional development path. Badly affected by the 1966-67 drought, the village subsequently expanded tubewell irrigation and benefited from the productivity gains of the Green Revolution. By 1981 it was already seen as a relatively prosperous village. Dominated by middle castes (Kurmis) and large peasants, it had fairly advanced agriculture with extensive irrigation and use of high yielding seeds, some diversification into commercial crops and good links with local markets. Education levels were fairly high, with around 70 per cent adult male literacy (but only 20 per cent for women). But the possibilities for development were constrained by the stagnant Bihar economy, which showed little dynamism until after the turn of the century. In addition, the agrarian system was highly exploitative, with very low wages and extensive bondage of labour. Living standards were low among poorer sections of the village, with severe food deficits. Resistance to exploitation was already growing in South Bihar at the time, and there is a history of labour agitation and Naxalism in the region in the 1980s, but in Chandkura the agrarian model survived into the 1990s, with yields of the main crops rising significantly in this period, and certainly faster than population growth, so the productive potential of the village continued to increase.

In the 1990s, the agrarian system changed radically. There were several factors. Increasing pressure from activist groups may have played some role, but in addition increasing investment

in agricultural mechanization made cultivators less dependent on attached labour, and employment opportunities outside the village started to provide alternative, non-agricultural options. Migration, both within Bihar and to other parts of India, started to rise, and by the end of the decade there was a migrant in almost a quarter of households. The village labour market was transformed: bonded labour disappeared and casual daily employment came to dominate. The wage system remained otherwise very traditional, with a persistence of payments in kind, but real wages rose substantially. Nevertheless the overall level of inequality within the village remained high, with a sharp segmentation of opportunities for different castes. In this period there was little effective state intervention to improve infrastructure or support agricultural development, and social policies largely remained on paper.

Over the last decade there has been a further evolution. Four of the most significant developments have been the further growth of employment opportunities outside the village, increasing diversification and commercialization of agriculture, the rise in education, especially of girls, and increasingly effective state social policies. By 2009 non-agricultural activities, mostly outside the village but many within daily commuting distance, accounted for more half of all principal occupations, although most households retained at least some participation in agriculture. The tightening labour market led to rising real wages, so that by 2009 they were close to triple those in 1981, or even more at peak seasons. More distant migration also increased, much of it to regular jobs, but many migrants also returned to the village after only short periods away. Agricultural production continued to expand, with fairly high levels of investment in equipment and improved methods. Employers have adapted to higher wages and reduced their dependence on labour, in part through capital-labour substitution, though this has no doubt constrained production growth. Some remnants of the old economic system persist, notably wage payments in kind (grain), not necessarily in the interests of workers. But on the whole this is a village where peasant agriculture is developing towards a capitalist model through the expansion of its own productive forces and increasing integration in the local market economy. Inequality, or at least the gap between wage labourers and larger cultivators, has certainly decreased, and poorer households uniformly report greatly improved levels of living. Girls' education has increased, as in other parts of the state, but still lags behind boys. Moreover, the labour market remains highly segmented by sex, as most of the newer and more lucrative opportunities have developed outside the village, while women are mostly confined to local agricultural work.

Given Chandkura's location near to Patna, and improvements in communications, the village is clearly now well placed to benefit from the accelerated growth of the Bihar economy. But whether this will create employment within the village, or on the contrary encourage out-migration to Patna and elsewhere, remains to be seen.

Mahisham's development trajectory is quite different. In 1981 it was a backward village, vulnerable to both flood and drought, despite an embankment, built in the 1950s, which protected the village from even worse flooding from the Kosi river. Like many other parts of North Bihar, in Mahisham the agrarian structure was dominated by landlords and large peasants with little interest in agricultural innovation. Landholdings

were skewed, with few small or medium peasants. There was a substantial population of attached labourers, though proportionately less than in Chandkura, but in addition half of the population consisted of casual agricultural wage workers. Wages were higher than in Chandkura, but this reflected a large employment deficit and the need for employers to meet the nutritional needs of their workforce. Some 5 per cent of households were engaged in traditional caste occupations.

Mahisham's economy could not support the large number of casual wage workers in the village, especially in a region subject to large fluctuations in agricultural output, and migration to distant destinations was already substantial in 1981 – there were migrants in a quarter of households, mainly migrating seasonally to the productive agricultural regions of Punjab and Haryana. Probably for this reason, the semi-feudal agrarian system was less oppressive than in Chandkura, for workers had an alternative. So during the 1980s low productivity agriculture persisted alongside growing migration. Migration was necessarily long distance because there were few non-agricultural employment opportunities being created locally within North Bihar.

By the 1990s, as in Chandkura, the semi-feudal system was dying in Mahisham, though the process was more gradual and there were still a few attached labourers at the turn of the century. By the late 1990s there were migrants in more than half of all households, local wages had started to rise and they had largely shifted from payments in kind to cash. There was some growth in agricultural productivity, based on an expansion of irrigation and the use of high yielding seeds and fertilisers, but it was much slower than Chandkura and there was little investment in agricultural equipment. Nevertheless, with the increase in migration incomes were rising in the village, especially among the lower income groups who were the first beneficiaries.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw an acceleration of this pattern. Migration continued to increase, so that by 2009 there were migrants in almost every family, leaving the village for shorter or longer periods to a wide variety of occupations all over the country; many of these were casual daily jobs, but the proportion finding regular work has been increasing. Most migrants, even if they are away for 10 months out of 12, maintain their families in the village and remit or bring back large amounts from their earnings. The majority of households depend on migrants for the greater part of their income. Local non-agricultural employment is mainly limited to caste occupations. Meanwhile, agriculture remains relatively stagnant and confined to traditional crops. Because most men in the prime working ages are away, agricultural labour is largely provided by women, and female labour force participation has risen considerably. Wages have risen within the village; overall they have doubled since 1981, and are now similar to those in Chandkura.

Because of the income flows from migration, average incomes in Mahisham are comparable to those in Chandkura despite the backwardness of its production system. In addition, some social changes seem to be occurring faster. Girls' schooling has been rising faster than in Chandkura and female literacy is now higher in Mahisham – it was far lower in 1981. Moreover, the social hierarchy of the village may be changing more quickly in Mahisham.

Some of the upper caste, formerly landlord families are losing land, at the same time as some Scheduled Caste families with migrants are buying land or investing in agricultural production or small businesses. Overall income inequality has clearly been declining.

Unlike Chandkura, Mahisham has not benefitted greatly from the accelerated growth of the Bihar economy; it is too far from the main centres of this growth. But of course it benefitted considerably from the accelerated growth of the Indian economy as a whole, which was the source of the employment opportunities for migrants. With no sign of a change in agricultural dynamism, for the foreseeable future migration is likely to continue to be the engine of rising incomes in the village.

What can we learn by comparing these two development experiences? Many interesting contrasts emerge from the discussion above:

- Agricultural production: the conditions for agriculture in the two villages are not dramatically different, indeed irrigation is in principle easier in Mahisham than in Chandkura, since water is more abundant, but Chandkura consistently shows higher levels of innovation and productivity. This seems to be endogenous rather than the result of government programmes – indeed in Chandkura there is complaint about the weakness of the latter. There is of course a caste factor, with land in Chandkura dominated by Kurmis, who have a progressive agricultural tradition, while in Mahisham Brahmins dominate, along with some landowning Muslim households. Kurmi households invest more and engage personally with their cultivation, taking full advantage of new cultivation techniques – hence the spread of vegetable cultivation, the use of pesticides, etc. It is true that Chandkura is much better connected for marketing produce, with Patna only a couple of hours away by road. But remoteness is relative: Mahisham is only a few hours further from Patna, which does not matter very much for an onion or a potato (though it may for a mango). The real issue in Mahisham seems to be the decreasing importance of agriculture; why invest or innovate if higher incomes can be obtained from migration? As a result, traditional cropping patterns with low yields persist.
- Inequality: it seems, on balance, that economic inequality has declined in both villages, but for different reasons, and somewhat more in Mahisham. Opportunities for migration are distributed across the whole village population, with relatively greater benefits at the bottom – where there is access to a booming market for casual labour across India as a whole – and at the top, where migration may provide a route into public sector and white collar jobs. But the numbers are much greater at the bottom than at the top. It is the peasant households in the middle that have benefitted less. In Chandkura agricultural workers benefitted from the end of attached labour, and opportunities have grown for non-agricultural unskilled labour, mainly through commuting for work in nearby markets, construction and brick kilns rather than through migration to wider labour markets – so the options are more limited than in Mahisham. Meanwhile, the incomes of middle and large peasants have also grown through continued agricultural innovation, and as a result the income hierarchy in the village has probably changed less than in Mahisham, where some formerly dominant groups may be facing downward mobility.

- Gender equality: There have been remarkable changes in gender relations, though progress is uneven and somewhat faster in Mahisham. The key factors are migration and education. In Mahisham, male migration has clearly increased the responsibilities, mobility and participation of women in economic and financial activities. In Chandkura the change has been much slower, because fewer men are migrating and the mobility of women outside the village remains extremely limited. But in both villages there has been some degree of feminization of agricultural wage labour, and alongside this an intensification of wage segmentation, as the gap between agricultural wages (largely female, at least for some operations such as weeding and transplanting) and non-agricultural wages (mainly male) has widened. Meanwhile there has been a spectacular growth in the education of girls, again more in Mahisham, which is likely to generate pressure for further movement towards labour market equality.
- Changes in the production system have led to some social mobility, but perhaps not as much as one would expect. Of course, the caste system tends to limit mobility, especially within the village – outside the village, on the wider labour market, caste plays a less important role, although contact networks are important for access to regular jobs, and some industries where migrants work are dominated by particular castes and communities. Nevertheless, a degree of social and economic mobility can be observed, at least in Mahisham, where Scheduled Castes are now found owning or leasing in land, or running small businesses, clearly the result of income from migration. The hierarchy in Chandkura seems to be much more stable, with some larger peasants diversifying into business as a way of consolidating their economic dominance. Education also plays a role in promoting social mobility, especially for women vis-à-vis men. But while education levels are increasing among the poor, they are also increasing among the rich, who are able to invest in private schooling. If the gap between rich and poor is not being reduced, then the contribution of education to social mobility will be limited.
- Growth in income and production has made both villages more resistant to crisis, especially because today a much larger proportion of income comes from outside the village. Flood and drought still cause fluctuations in agricultural income, and natural catastrophes remain possible, especially in the North, where a devastating flood occurred in 2008 less than 50 km away from Mahisham.²⁴ But there has been an individualization of crisis, often connected with death or illness, or the need to meet social obligations. In Mahisham, this seems to be an important source of land loss, especially in households without sufficient income sources from migration. In both villages the alternative is increasing indebtedness, important in both villages, but more so in Chandkura, where both institutional and informal debt is twice as high as in Mahisham.
- Connections with the broader development process: Today the development in these two villages has to be seen in the context of a rapidly expanding Bihar economy, which is a new phenomenon. Earlier, migration from Mahisham was able to take advantage of job creation elsewhere in India as a result of the accelerated growth of the Indian economy

as a whole. Perhaps now the process will be brought back to Bihar. But there is not much sign of this yet in Mahisham, where migration, if anything, continues to increase. In Chandkura, close to the State capital, there may be some impact – perhaps as a result of the growth in commuting, and land speculation. But the effect is not yet large. For the time being, growth in Bihar is concentrated in construction, trade and services. Construction involves some job creation on major infrastructure projects, including major highways within 10 km of Chandkura and 20 km from Mahisham, but these do not seem to be a source of labour demand in the villages. On the other hand, work in brick kilns is regularly reported in both villages, as would be expected in a construction boom. Rising incomes of middle and upper income groups in the cities should raise demand for fruit and vegetables, and Chandkura is well placed to benefit. But first there has to be reliable cold storage (and therefore electricity) and good transport systems.

Finally we should look to the future. How sustainable are these two development paths? Are they likely to lead to further increases in employment and incomes?

Chandkura's model of development is clearly far from exhausted. More intensive agricultural practices could still substantially raise yields of traditional crops, albeit at a high cost in terms of irrigation, fertiliser, seeds and pesticides. And there is scope for the introduction of a wider variety of non-traditional crops, and investment in local agro-processing. Labour costs are rising, of course, and are likely to continue to rise. Wages within the village are not only still well below the official minimum wage, but also considerably below non-agricultural wages, which raises the bargaining power of male workers at least. But market forces are likely to be a more powerful factor than the organization of workers, which remains weak. On the other hand it will clearly be a struggle to overcome gender inequality in the labour market. Meanwhile, Chandkura is close enough to Patna – no more than an hour when the new highway is completed – to benefit from the spillover of urban growth in non-agricultural activities.

Mahisham's model is more of a puzzle. As we have seen, migration has been the key driver of economic change, and has underpinned rising standards of living. At the same time, since families stay in the village at a lower cost than in urban areas, and migrants return to the village after their peak working years, in some sense this is rural Bihar subsidizing India's urban growth process, for the latter does not pay the full cost of reproduction of labour.

Migration has a mix of positive and undesirable side-effects. We have seen that most migrants from Chandkura rapidly returned to the village, finding the work unpleasant or hard. On the other hand, in Mahisham migration for the same type of work seems to be accepted without question. Still, most migrants appear to be working very long hours – perhaps 70 hours a week or more – and working and living in cramped, unhygienic and sometimes unsafe conditions. We noted several health problems arising out of migration. We had one report of a migrant returning to Mahisham because he could earn as much there (as a carpenter) as in Delhi. But this is an isolated case, and for the time being there is no sign an end to the regular migration from the village across North India and beyond, like millions of men from other Bihar villages. And this has brought income, skills, a wider

vision of the world and greater equality within the village. Which suggests that Mahisham's model is by not exhausted either.

Still the long-term sustainability of a migration-led model of development remains debatable. If there were decent housing and decent jobs in the cities, whether inside Bihar or outside, many more families would certainly move permanently. But even circular migration on a scale like that in Mahisham shifts the focus to urban development, leaving behind rural backwaters without a strong economic base. And high rates of growth of the Bihar economy will not solve the problem – in fact the most likely outcome is polarization and increasing inequality within the State as the benefits of growth are captured by small, mainly urban groups. So it is easy to make the case for a much more intensive programme of support for local development in villages like Mahisham, based on agricultural as well as non-agricultural production that would increase and diversify employment opportunities for both men and women. This will not happen without more effective state intervention, extending to policies for economic development the improvements in implementation that have been achieved for some high profile social policies in recent years.

Migration will continue to remain important for Mahisham for more reasons than one. Apart from the economic gains, it is a powerful means of social mobility in an otherwise stagnant rural society. It embodies aspirations of the people, both young and old, and is generally perceived as a route to a better life. However, migrants are discriminated against in distant labour markets and they often work and live in precarious conditions in both urban and rural destinations. If high migration continues, it is urgent to give greater priority to the rights and welfare of migrant workers. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, despite its shortcomings, mandates not only minimum wages to migrant workers, but wage equality with local labourers, suitable residential accommodation and free medical facilities, among other things that most migrants have never heard of. Its implementation would certainly go a long way towards making migration more 'inclusive'. So alongside a greater emphasis on local development there is a need to ensure that migrants' rights are respected, that they live and work in decent conditions, and that they are able to participate fully in the social, political and cultural life of the cities and States to which they go.

Notes

1. On the original project see Prasad, P.H. et al. (1988). A major study carried out in 1998-99 was reported in Sharma et al (2001) and IHD (2004), and early results from resurveys in 2009-11 can be found in IHD (2011).
2. The Census of India uses the spelling Mahisan, and this was how the village was referred to in the earlier studies. However, the village is known as Mahisham locally, and this is the most direct transliteration into roman script of the Hindi spelling.
3. In the text the 1981-2 survey, which was carried out by the A.N.Sinha Institute of Social Studies in Patna, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization is referred to as the ANSIISS-ILO survey. The other surveys were carried out by the Institute for Human Development, New Delhi (IHD).
4. 2011 Census results at the village level have not been published at the time of writing. The average population increase in rural Bihar between 2001 and 2011 was almost 24 per cent, so the population of Chandkura is probably not far short of 3000 today.

5. The IHD 1998-99 survey showed a decline in attached labour of over 80 per cent for six villages in Madhubani district compared with 1981-82; see Sharma et. al (2001).
6. These calculations are very approximate, and estimates of yield growth between particular years can be greatly influenced by weather conditions in the years concerned. But the overall picture of growth should be robust. Estimates for 1995-96 from Wilson (1999).
7. All figures come from the IHD village and household surveys, 2009-10, and for 1981 from Prasad et al (1988) or from the unit level data of the ANSIISS-ILO Survey.
8. In Chandkura a pucca seer was 0.93 kg and a kaccha seer 0.65 kg. In Mahisham the pucca seer was the same as in Chandkura (0.93 kg) but the kaccha seer was less (0.58 kg).
9. Wilson (1999) and the 1999-2000 IHD survey (Sharma et al., 2001).
10. In 2011 the value of nasta was estimated at Rs 10-12 and the meal Rs 15-20. They typically consisted of 3 to 5 rotis plus some vegetables. The meal could be substituted by 500 grams of sattu.
11. In Chandkura 1 katha = 3.13 decimals of an acre.
12. Out of the 36 villages covered by the IHD study wages paid in kind were prevalent in 9 villages, 8 of them located in Gaya and Nalanda districts.
13. The type of grain depended on the seasonal availability. It could be paddy, rice, wheat, marua, etc. If payment was in paddy one kilo of paddy was equivalent to 0.750 kg of rice.
14. The value of a nasta was estimated to be Rs 8-10 (for roti plus vegetables or chilli and salt). The value of a meal was estimated to be Rs 15-20.
15. See Rodgers (1973).
16. Comparing wages in grain equivalents is in principle less accurate than using a full price index. However grain still constitutes the largest component of consumption of agricultural workers, and applying a normal price index also faces a variety of methodological difficulties in situations where wages are paid in a mix of cash and kind, so in practice this may be the best first approximation.
17. Figures based on the 2011 IHD survey. 138 households were surveyed in Mahisham and 83 in Chandkura.
18. By the same token, NREGA cannot be a significant explanation for rising wages in these villages.
19. Data from ANSIISS-ILO 1982 survey of women; men were also asked similar questions, and reported somewhat higher calorie intake levels, but we believe that the information from women is more accurate because they did the cooking. 98 per cent of recommended intakes may appear relatively high for a poor village, but note: (a) this refers only to calorie intakes, and deficiencies were certainly much higher for other dimensions of nutrition; (b) the survey was mainly carried out in the period December 1981 to May 1982, which included the paddy and wheat harvests, when more food was available; (c) 98 per cent is the mean, so at least half of households were below recommended levels.
20. This should not be taken to indicate that there is a larger proportion of poor households in Chandkura, because the identification of Antyodaya households is heavily influenced by local and political factors.
21. In the 1971 Census a household was defined as 'a group of persons who commonly live together and would take their meals from a common kitchen unless the exigencies of work prevented any of them from doing so'.
22. The goldsmith in Hilsa gives loans on interest. If you pawn ornaments or other valuables, the interest rate is 36 per cent a year; without any security the rate of interest is higher: 60 per cent and above.
23. More details on this family are given in the household profiles in the annex to this paper.
24. The 2008 Kosi floods caused unprecedented loss of life, livelihoods, infrastructure and property in north-eastern Bihar. The Kosi river burst its embankment and changed course. About 1,000 villages involving three million people were affected, of whom about one million were evacuated. See the IHD report *Kosi Floods 2008: How we coped? What we need! A Perception Survey on Impact and Recovery Strategy*, UNDP, New Delhi, 2009. Mahisham is close to the western embankment of the Kosi river but escaped these floods, which affected villages to the east of the river.

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2. Household and village surveys

Unit level data were used for Mahisham and Chandkura from the following surveys, all of which are archived at the Institute for Human Development, New Delhi:

1981-82 ANSISS-ILO Bihar Survey

- Village survey 1981
- Household census 1981
- Women's survey 1982
- Household survey 1982

1998-99 IHD Bihar Survey

- Household census 1998
- Household survey 1999

2009-11 IHD Bihar Survey

- Village survey 2009
- Household survey 2009-10
- Village survey 2011
- Household survey 2011

ANNEX I: Family case studies

The following households were interviewed in depth in February-March 2012. All had been interviewed earlier (sometimes a previous generation), either as part of the household surveys in 1998-99 and 2009-10, or as case studies. More details are given below for households marked with an asterisk.

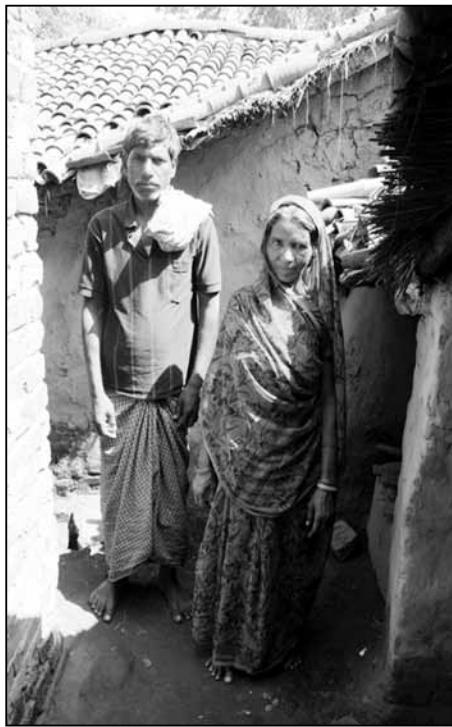
Chandkura

- Ramdhani Prasad, 55 years old, Kurmi, small cultivator, 5 household members.
- Jitendra Saw, 45 years old, OBC-II, shop keeper and cultivator, 10 household members.
- *Chotan Mochi, 48 years old, Chamar, agricultural labour household and occasional sharecropper, 7 household members.
- *Sibu Paswan, 75 years old, Paswan, agricultural labour and occasional share-cropper (main worker is son Indra, aged 50). 11 household members.
- Baldev Ravidas, 70 years old, Chamar, agricultural labour household (main worker is son Rajkumar, 45 years old), 9 household members.
- Dharmvir Paswan, 25 years old, small entrepreneur and migrant, 4 household members.
- *Dharmvir Sharma, 30 years old, Barhi (OBC-II), carpenter and casual wage labourer, 10 household members.
- Raja Ram Prasad, 69 years old, Kurmi, large cultivator and entrepreneur, 5 household members.

Mahisham

- Binod Mandal, 37 years old, Dhanuk (OBC-I), migrant factory worker and cultivator, 5 household members.
- *Md Salauddin, 33 years old, Muslim, cultivator and former migrant, 8 family members.
- Md Samsul, 35 years old, Muslim, migrant and casual wage labour in agriculture and construction, 6 family members.
- Narayan Yadav, 47 years old, Yadav, small cultivator, 6 household members.
- Motilal Saday, 73 years old, Musahar, cultivation and migration for semi-skilled wage labour (son), 11 household members.
- Upendra Saday, 35 years old, Musahar, casual wage labour in agriculture and brick kiln, short term migration, 7 household members.
- *Surendra Jha, 42 years old, Brahmin, former migrant factory worker, some land leased out, 4 household members.
- Raj Kumar Jha/Saroj Kumar Jha, 53 and 45, two brothers forming single household, Brahmin, landlords, some cultivation, manager of PDS shop, 6 household members.
- Malik Thakur, 48 years old, Barhi (carpenter, OBC-II), cultivation and carpentry, mainly self-employed, 10 household members.
- Lalu Jha, 65 years old, Brahmin, small cultivator, son is salesman (migrant), 3 household members present but also connections with migrant son in Delhi.
- *Lalji Kamat, 48 years old, Kewat (OBC-I), all males migrate, mainly casual wage labour, 11 household members of which 5 away.
- Chandrakishore Jha and Chandrashekhar Jha, brothers aged about 55 and 50, Brahmin, large cultivators and (migrant) police constable, 11 members in two households.

Chotan Mochi, Chandkura



Chotan Mochi and his wife, Usha Devi

Chotan Mochi (48) lives in the Chamar tola of Chandkura with his wife, Usha Devi (43), sons Ranjan Ravidas (21) and Niranjan Kumar (14), and daughters, Sanju Kumari (16), Anju Kumari (10) and Anjali Kumari (6). Their eldest daughter, Ranju Devi is married, and lives in a nearby village.

Chotan's work history is diverse. There has been a remarkable transition in his work in agriculture - from an attached labour to casual wage labour to a sharecropper in the course of three decades. Equally striking is the non-agricultural work he has done, both as a resident, and as a migrant. Chotan's father, Jamun Ravidas worked as an attached labourer all his life, and at the age of 16, Chotan started working as a *halwaha* when he got 10 kathas of land to cultivate and a grain loan. After about five years of working as a *halwaha*, he decided that he would no longer be a "bandhua mazdoor" (bonded labourer), but be a "chutta mazdoor" (free labourer). He returned his landlord's land, paid off his loan by working extra, and started working as a casual labourer in agriculture. At that time, wages were almost the same for attached and agricultural labourers (1-1.5 kilograms of grain per day), and being a casual labourer, he was free to seek work wherever he liked.

After working as a casual wage labourer in agriculture for about five years, he started playing music as a daily wager in a band in Patna. Having learnt the art, he created his own band, 'Chotan Band', along with eleven other villagers with the help of a loan of 5000 rupees from the bank to purchase 9-10 musical instruments in 1984. Chotan Band played in marriage parties in nearby

villages, as well as in far off Patna and Bihar Sharif, and did good business. As a musician and entrepreneur, Chotan was able to earn 3000 – 5000 rupees every year, and fully repaid the bank loan within 3 years. He enjoyed playing music, and also worked as a casual labourer in agriculture when there were no assignments for the band. However, for the last few years, he does not play in the band anymore, on the doctor's advice, due to pain in his chest and lungs.

Both Chotan and son Ranjan migrated for work 5-6 years ago. While Chotan went to Ahmedabad to work in a textile factory, Ranjan worked in a metalworking shop in Coimbatore. Both went through local networks, worked as daily wage labourers for 12 hours every day and shared accommodation with other workers (six to a room, in both cases). They returned within a year – Chotan, because his younger children needed care, and Ranjan, because he found the work hard.

For the last few years, Chotan has been leasing in land for cultivation, when land is available (it is not available every year), and cultivates paddy and wheat. The input costs and output are shared with the landlord equally. Last year, he leased in 26 kathas of land, which produced 14 maunds of paddy, of which his share was 7 maunds. Agricultural practices are mechanised to a great extent – tractors and power tillers are used for ploughing, and the latter eliminates the need for weeding, and is thus preferred by Chotan. Chemical fertiliser (urea) is used in both paddy and wheat, and after a crop failure due to insects three years ago, he has started using pesticides for the paddy crop. Along with leasing in land, Chotan also works as an agricultural labour, and sometimes as a construction labourer in the village, Usha Devi works on the leased in land, as well as for wages in other farms. They receive grain from the PDS shop in the village, and often sell small amounts of grain to the *kirana* shop to 'buy' groceries and other items.

In recent years, the family has put unusual emphasis on the education of its young members. All the children are currently studying. Ranjan had dropped out of school in 2006, but he has reappeared for the matriculation examinations earlier this year, after a gap of 6 years, and was taking private tuition. Sanju too has re-enrolled at School, and at the age of 17, she studies in Class 4. There is a general sense (and conviction) that investing in education will have high returns in the future.

Access to facilities is poor. The household does not have electricity. There is no toilet, and access to water is through a public handpump, shared by about 15 households. They have one mobile phone which is used by Ranjan. There is one *chulha*, and Usha cooks for all the members of the household. Cowdung cakes are used for cooking (Usha makes them at a villager's house, and gets half). The family has two meals every day. While they eat vegetables every day, pulses are consumed about thrice a week, and egg, fish or meat is consumed about twice a month.

What has been the change in the last 30 years? It is interesting to note that this household was recorded as one of the poorest households in the village in a PRA wealth ranking exercise conducted in the village survey in 1998. Chotan says that the family's circumstances have greatly improved. Earlier, food was less, and it was necessary to share. Now, there is sufficient food, and everyone eats well. They have more clothes and have made a good house, he feels. In the last five years, the village environment has considerably improved, there has been "vikas" (development), he sees the change in his lane, and in the mud road leading to the village, which has become a brick road. Thefts, which were commonplace earlier, do not occur any more. There is no fear, and he feels safe in the village.

Sibu Paswan (Indra Paswan), Chandkura



Sibu Paswan in front of the buffalo shed where he sleeps

In Chandkura the Paswan tola is a compact cluster of houses on the edge of the village, with an open space in the middle where there is a common handpump and ground which is used for processing crops, and making chulhas and earthen pots. Sibu Paswan's house opens onto this space; behind it are the fields. He is a widower, about 75 years old, and four generations of his family live together – he; his son Indra and Indra's wife Nirjala; their six children – one daughter and five sons; and the wife and baby son of the eldest son, Bhola, who is 20 years old, and the only one who is working since their other children are at school. The house, around a small courtyard, is mostly kaccha, but there is one pucca room, built under the government housing programme (IAY). Bhola and his wife sleep there. The others sleep in the kaccha rooms around the courtyard, but Sibu sleeps outside the compound in an open shed he shares with a buffalo. Sibu himself moves slowly but seems in reasonable health, though he no longer does any work for wages.

Sibu's life was marked by the great drought and famine of 1966-67. At that time he was working as an attached labourer. Along with other villagers he was forced by the drought to migrate to Assam where he did earthwork for a few months, exploited by local contractors. After he returned, he worked mainly as a casual agricultural labourer. Later on, his son Indra was also an attached labourer for some time, and was still attached in 1998 according to the survey carried out at that time. But by then the practice of attached labour was dying out, and since that time there are no longer attached labourers in the village. Most attached labourers were ploughmen, and demand for permanent ploughmen disappeared as bullocks were replaced by power tillers and tractors. The image of attached labour is by no means all negative. Sibu recalled that work was available for a longer period for attached workers, and the landlord gave an advance and land for sharecropping, as well as loans during the lean season.

Afterwards the family mostly lived from casual agricultural wage work, by both men and women. Indra did migrate to Haryana for three months, working in a brick kiln, but he found the work too hard and did not stay. Later on Indra's son, Bhola, went with a small group to

work in a factory in Ludhiana. But earning only Rs 1600-1700 per month for 12 hours work per day was not attractive, and he too returned after three months. In the last few years the family has been able to lease in some land, 1.5 to 2 acres, for sharecropping, and this is an important source of income and employment. They grow paddy, wheat, maize and coriander, using fertiliser but not pesticides. This provides close to 30 maunds of paddy and 15 to 20 maunds of wheat per year, altogether enough to meet most of the needs for grain of the family, to which is added wages from casual agricultural labour and construction work. With the exception of construction work, most of this income is in the form of grain, although the coriander is sold for cash and Sibu also receives a state pension of Rs 200 per month.

Sibu and his family eat simply, usually rice or roti with vegetables, sometimes with pulses and occasionally fish or meat, fish depending on the season; milk only when the buffalo is in milk. Access to food has improved over time. Nirjala said that earlier the chulha was lit only once a day, now they cook twice every day. Earlier there was hunger, but not today. One reason for better food availability was increases in wages. Twenty years ago, it was said, the wage for a full day's transplanting was 1 kg of rice; this is confirmed by surveys in the early 1980s. Now it is 2.5 kg of rice, and sometimes 3 to 4 kg at peak seasons.

But while basic food needs are met, they have few assets, apart from the house and the buffalo. The women have two saris each. There is no mobile phone, nor is there electricity in the house, though this is a problem for the whole village because the transformer burned 6 months ago and has not been replaced. There is no toilet and the handpump is shared by several households, although it is only just outside the house.

Something that is changing fast is schooling. The whole family was reported as illiterate in 2009, with only Sibu's eldest grandson attending school, but two years later all four children of school age were studying. This seems to be the result of effective government programmes, for reference was made to the availability of scholarships, school uniform, midday meal and free text books. On the other hand, government health programmes seem much less effective, and the family relies largely on local quacks and private doctors in Hilsa, the nearest town. All deliveries of children were at home, and two of Indra's children died at the time of birth, although this was some years ago.

The men move freely in and out of the village, but the women much less so. Indra's wife goes to the market in Hilsa only every six months or so, and they are dependent on village shops for everyday purchases and sales of grain – sales because since they are largely paid in grain, and they have a surplus that must be sold, at prices far below the market – rice is sold for Rs 10 per kilo when the purchase price is Rs 20 per kilo. Otherwise the women mainly move out of the village to visit relatives.

On the whole this family seems to be benefitting from the general economic progress of the village. Access to land for sharecropping has helped to improve their living standards, but a tightening labour market also led to increases in wages, and the family has also benefitted from a variety of government programmes (in particular IAY, Sibu's pension and subsidies for schooling).

Dharmvir Sharma, Chandkura



Dharmvir Sharma's mother, Sarita Devi, with her two daughters and daughters-in-law.

This 10-member family split into three nuclear units after the death of the Dharmvir Sharma's father - Bhajan Mistry - in a road accident in October 2011. He was on his way home from work, returning from Hilsa to Chandkura. The extended family now consists of Dharmvir (30), his wife Ruby Devi (25) and their son Aman (4), his brother Ramvir (28), his wife Pinky (23) and their two daughters Riya (3) and Rishu (1), his widowed mother Sarita Devi (55) and her two unmarried daughters (Dharmvir's sisters) Archana (18) and Babita (14).

Bhajan Mistry was a carpenter (Barhi caste) like his father Ramavtar Sharma before him. His jajmani occupation consisted in making and repairing wooden agricultural implements. Under the jajmani system he was servicing 30-35 cultivating households and received 10 kg of paddy and 10 kg of wheat a year from each in exchange. With the introduction of tractors and power tillers wooden ploughs have disappeared and the traditional jajmani system faded away. Before his death Bhajan Mistry was employed on a daily basis in a saw mill in Hilsa.

As work was not available the whole year round both his sons migrated to find work outside the village. Ramvir migrated to Bombay where he worked in a metalworking factory for one to two years. He came back two or three times during that period, for a month or two at a time. He did not send remittances regularly but brought back purchases and money. Since the death of their father the brothers have not migrated any more. Nowadays they do wage work on a daily basis, predominantly in agriculture. They also do work casually in construction and in carpentry outside the village, for which they are paid Rs 150 to Rs 200 a day. They do not do carpentry in Chandkura as the villagers view such work as a jajmani task and are not ready not pay them the same rate. On the day of the interview Dharmvir was doing construction work in Hilsa and Ramvir was working on a farm in the village making bunds in preparation for transplanting onions.

Among the women of the family only the mother, Sarita Devi, goes out to work. She never did that while her husband was alive but after the partition of the family she started to do agricultural wage work to support herself and her two daughters. She gets 2.5 kg of rice per day for transplanting paddy and onions and 1/14th as harvest share for paddy, onions, coriander, wheat and masoor. Her eldest daughter is physically disabled (a sequel of polio) and unable to work. Her younger daughter is studying. Sarita Devi has also a calf she takes care of. Dharmvir's and Ramvir's wives do only domestic work and look after their children.

The educational situation of the family is mixed. Dharmvir completed class 10 and his wife class 6 while Ramvir completed class 2 and his wife class 10. Both the mother and Archana are illiterate. Babita is reading in class 9 and received a bicycle through school from the government programme. She also received school dresses and books free of charge.

The family neither owns nor operates any land. In 2002 the existing kaccha house was replaced by a pucca house. It has been extended bit by bit and an upper floor is currently being built. The family was not a beneficiary of the *Indira Awas Yojana* scheme and therefore took several loans from relatives. A private handpump was installed 4-5 years ago. A toilet was built under the *Total Sanitation Campaign* but it lacks water capacity and is used only by the disabled sister. The family installed a solar plate that supplies two light bulbs. There are 2 mobile phones, 2 mosquito nets (Sarita Devi and Dharmvir) and a sewing machine used by Ramvir's wife, who learned sewing before she married. She uses it only for domestic purposes but her mother-in-law pays her to stitch her blouses. Sarita Devi owns two saris and her daughters-in-law about five or six saris each. None of them buy their own saris. The mother wears what is passed on to her and the saris of her daughters-in-law are gifts from their respective families.

The women share the kitchen premises but cook separately. Some tension may exist among the women of the family which prompted the partition. Sarita Devi has a BPL card and gets 15 kilos of rice and 10 kilos of wheat when it is available in the PDS shop. She does not get grain regularly but it is available in most months. Usually each family unit eats 2 meals a day. Rice and vegetables are eaten every day, pulses once or twice a week. Dharmvir's and Ramvir's families eat eggs, fish and meat once or twice a month but not Sarita Devi and her two daughters. Milk is given every day to the younger child. Tea is drunk from time to time.

The women very rarely go outside the village and only for health reasons or to visit relatives. For medical treatment the family refers to private doctors (and a quack is installed in a room directly adjoining their house). Outside the village Sarita Devi and Dharmvir's wife go to Hilsa while Ramvir and his wife get treatment in Bakhtiyarpur (near Pinky's parents, 15 kilometres away). Pinky's family seems to be better off and does not trust government doctors and medical facilities. Last year Ramvir was treated for hydrocele and hospitalised for a week. Both his daughters were born in a private maternity home and the births cost Rs 3,000 and Rs 4,000 respectively.

In order to build the house the family contracted several loans from relatives at 4-5 per cent interest rates per month. They have been repaying gradually and the current outstanding loan amounts to Rs 15,000. For his operation last year Ramvir borrowed Rs 15,000 from his brother-in-law. No interest was attached to the loan. Money might be a sensitive issue; as Sarita Devi put it: "*Paisa hi dost banata hai aur paisa hi dushman banata hai*" (It is money that makes friends, and it is money that makes enemies).

All the women thought that the value of dowry had increased over the years. Twenty-two years ago Sarita Devi's eldest daughter Anjula was married at the early age of 12 and a dowry of Rs 600 was paid. When Dharmvir married they received Rs 1,200 as dowry from Ruby's family and when Ramvir married they received Rs 4,000 from Pinky's family.

What are the perceptions of change? Sarita Devi felt that nowadays her family had less income and more expenses. Thirty years ago they did not have any problem of food because of the jajmani system, but now they are facing some problems of food. Previously she had a surplus of grain and nowadays she has to buy grains. The other major change is girls' education. More girls are studying than previously because they get food, clothes and bicycles through school. She mentioned that over the last five years other changes have affected the village: electricity, the digging of the ahar-pyne and some road construction. There is more employment, and migration and commuting have increased.

Mohammed Salauddin, Mahisham

Rabia Khatun, Mohammed Salauddin's mother

Mohammed Salauddin's mother, Rabia Khatun, is sixty years old, and lives in the Line *tola* of Mahisham village with two of her sons and her four daughters. Her husband, Mohammed Hanam passed away eight years ago due to a heart ailment. From a former *zamindar* family, Mohammed Hanam was a landowner, and supervised agricultural work in his farm.

They had four sons and four daughters. One son died in 2004. Two sons, Salauddin (33) and Sabauddin (30) migrated for work to Delhi at an early age due to economic difficulties faced by the family. Salauddin left first, at the age of 16, and worked in several embroidery units in Delhi for the next decade and a half. In 2008, he underwent a serious surgery of the stomach, much related to the nature of his work (sitting in a cramped position, day in and day out), and had to return back to his village, where he now supervises agricultural work on the family farm. He does not feel fit to go back to Delhi to work. Sabauddin left much later, after he graduated from college. He works as a mathematics tutor in Delhi, and visits the village once every year, for about a week, at the time of *Eid*. The remittances sent by Sabauddin (about 5000 rupees every month) are the main source of income that supports the family.

Of the other children, a fourth son, Tanvir Alam (22), is a college student at Madhepur, daughters Shyista (27) and Daraksha (24) are primarily engaged in domestic work, and Kakhsha (18) and Gulista (15) study in high school.

An erstwhile landlord family, they have sold their land bit by bit to make ends meet. They have also fallen back on this land in times of major expenditure and crisis – Shyista's marriage (30 kathas sold) and Abdul Hanam's treatment (5 kathas sold). The family currently owns 12

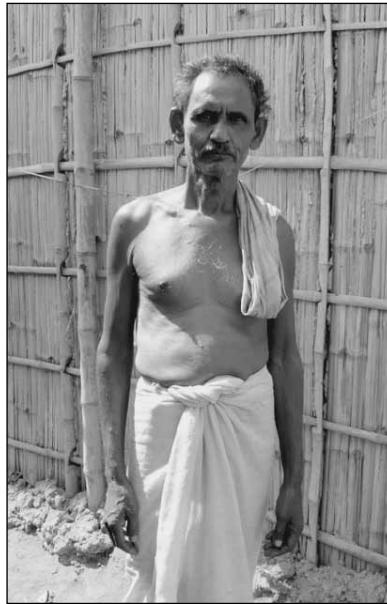
kathas of land, on which they harvested 6 maunds of paddy and two quintals of wheat last year (2011), all of which was used for own consumption. The land was cultivated under Salauddin's supervision. Earlier, when Salauddin was in Delhi, this land used to be leased out. While in the past they had bullocks for ploughing, they currently own no livestock or capital equipment in agriculture. They have six mango trees, whose fruits are consumed within the household.

2004 was a devastating year for the family. Mohammed Hanam suffered a heart ailment, and was treated at the Darbhanga Medical College for about a month. He died on the first night upon his return home. Later in the year, the eldest son, Saddam Hussein drowned in a flood right outside the family home. The eldest daughter, Shyista was married, but was forced to return home as her marriage did not work out due to additional dowry demands.

Overall, the economic situation of the household has improved over the last three decades. They have three meals a day – pulses are consumed every day for lunch, and vegetables are eaten at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Tea (with milk) is consumed thrice a day. While the meals are cooked on a *chulha*, a small cylinder is used for making tea, and half a kilo of milk is bought every day for this. While earlier they rarely ate meat and fish, these are often consumed now. They hardly had any clothes then, Rabia owns five saris now. The family also owns a bicycle, two mobile phones and a colour television.

At the same time, the household does not seem to have recovered from the multiple shocks it has suffered. Rabia worries that Shyista's marriage did not work out and while most of her children are of marriageable age, none of them are married. Salauddin's return to the village has put a lot of pressure on Sabauddin, who is now the sole bread-earner of the family.

Lalji Kamat, Mahisham



Gopal Kamat, Lalji Kamat's brother

Lalji Kamat, who is close to 50 years old, has been migrating for work for the last 20 years or more. His family lives in Mahisham, in Main Tola, an OBC-I family surrounded by Brahmin households, but he only returns two or three times a year from Lucknow, where he works in the vegetable market as a coolie, earning Rs 100-150 per day. In this family, migration is a way of life. Lalji's four sons all migrate as well. The elder two, Santosh and Ravi, work in Mumbai as casual construction labourers (and selling tea by the roadside), while the younger two aged 13 and 15 are said to be studying, though this may just be the story they tell in the village.

Lalji's father also migrated for some of his life, working in Cooch Behar on a tea estate for 5 to 10 years in the 1960s or 1970s. But he also cultivated his own land, 5 to 6 bighas at one time. Before he died, he had lost most of the land, sold to pay medical expenses, for he was ill for the last 5 to 6 years of his life. When he died in the early 1980s there was still an acre or so, divided between Lalji and his brother Gopal, who separated their households in the early 1990s, but by 1998 they were landless. Gopal now lives in the next house, separated by a fence which looked like testimony to bad family relations.

Over the years, Lalji and his sons have done a variety of jobs away from the village. Before working in Lucknow he worked in the carpet industry in Benares (washing carpets), and as an agricultural labourer in Punjab. His eldest son Santosh did casual construction work in Delhi, and also worked with his father in Benares. Meanwhile, Lalji's three nephews, Gopal's sons, all migrate to Mumbai or Lucknow as well. Only Gopal does not migrate, for health reasons. So in these two households, of the 9 men and boys, 8 are away, and 6 of them at least are working.

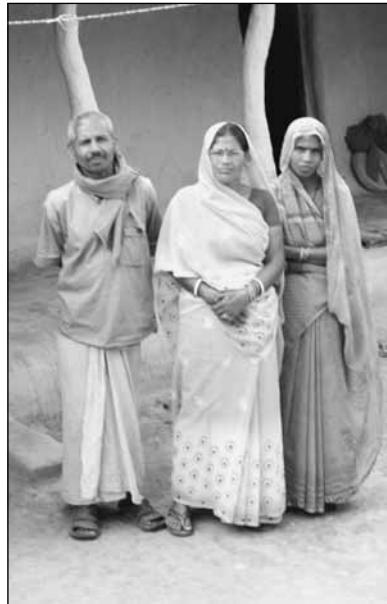
And the women stay behind. But they live in separate compartments. In these two adjacent houses, on a rather small space, there may be as many as 6 different households, in the sense of separate cooking and living arrangements. Only the courtyard is common. The wives of Lalji's migrant sons, and their children (three in all), live and cook separately from their mother-in-law,

Moti Devi, and from each other, and receive separate remittances from their husbands, Rs 1500 per month from Lalji to his wife, Rs 2000 per month from his sons to their wives (though the money is routed through one bank account in the name of Anita Devi, Ravi's wife).

How well do they live? There is a pucca part of the house, built under the IAY housing programme, and occupied by the daughters-in-law and their children, while Lalji's wife sleeps in the older kaccha building. There is a new toilet in the courtyard, and electricity for one light bulb purchased for Rs 50 per month. Only Anita Devi has a mobile phone, and only Renu Devi, Santosh's wife, has a mosquito net. But they eat fish weekly, meat occasionally, milk for the children daily, and the daughters-in-law have 4 or 5 saris each. Only Moti Devi occasionally does agricultural wage labour, for essentially they live off the remittances from their husbands, with no animals and no other income sources. But they get PDS grain – the extended household has two BPL and one AAY cards – as well as grain from the ICDS for one of the grandsons. As for health, they use the local primary health centre, and occasionally private doctors at Rs 100 per consultation; and took a loan of Rs 5,000 for the treatment of one of the grandchildren. The children were born at home with the help of the local dai.

On the whole, while the living standard is modest, most physical needs seem to be met. There is a perception in the family that food at least has improved. As Moti Devi said, previously we ate marua and khesari, now we eat rice and roti; and we buy milk for the grandchildren, but we did not buy milk for the children. Earlier there were food crises, but not today. And health facilities and communications have improved. A glaring gap is education, with only the youngest two sons going beyond class 2. That these boys were said to be studying in Mumbai suggests that there is at least some recognition of the importance of education, but schooling does not seem to be needed for migrants to get casual work. There is little social organization beyond the family. Leisure consists mostly of gossip, and the men play cards and talk about the availability of work. There is no television or other source of entertainment. Nor are there self-help groups, nor political or caste organizations. So the family lives well enough from migration, but there is little sense of community or aspiration beyond the family, and most of the men live in a society of their own, far from village life.

Surendra Jha - Mahisham



Surendra Jha with his wife Indu Devi and his sister-in-law Hira Devi

Surendra Jha (42 years old) is a Brahmin whose family consists of himself, his wife Indu Devi (38 years), and their two sons Sagar and Raghav (14 and 11 years). He has also an older daughter Rani who is married and does not live at home any more. Surendra and his elder brother Fulendra, their wives and children used to live as a joint family together with their father Ugant Lal but four years ago the family split into two separate households because of disputes between the wives. They all live in the same compound though, but after partition Ugant Lal stayed with Surendra's family. He died 12-18 months ago.

Ugant Lal's father used to own 15 acres of land that he divided equally between his three sons 25-30 years ago. Out of his 5 acres Ugant Lal sold one acre for each of his three daughters' marriages and in 2010 he sold a bigha (i.e. 0.8 acre) for the wedding of his grand-daughter Rani. This last piece of land was purchased by a Yadav bank manager from outside the village who married a Mahisham girl. Now Surendra Jha and his brother are left with 1.1 acre jointly owned. The land has not been divided yet because Fulendra works in Delhi and seldom comes to Mahisham. The family has also a small kitchen garden in the household compound and 0.16 acre (4 kathas) of mango orchard with ten trees and some bamboo. The mangoes are not sold. The bamboo is mostly used by the family but is sometimes sold.

Ugant Lal used to cultivate his land himself and hire labour. Now Surendra leases the land out because he is not in good health and it is difficult to hire labour. He only supervises the work of the sharecropper. In 2010 he received 5 maunds of paddy and 4 maunds of wheat as his 50 per cent share. He does not contribute to any input costs but instead leaves all the crop by-products to his sharecropper.

At the age of 15 Surendra migrated for 2-3 years to Jaipur and stayed with his brother, who was working in an oil mill (*dalda* factory). Surendra did not work there and came back

to the village. Five to seven years later he went to Vapi (Gujarat), where he worked for about 10 years in a textile company (Natraj Textile Pvt Ltd, now Nikunj Fabrics) which employed 5000 workers. He was working on piece rate, finishing saris and being paid Rs 1 per sari. His employer provided free lodging: a room shared between 3 workers. His monthly earnings depended on the availability of orders and therefore were subject to fluctuations. In a good month, he would earn Rs 3,000, but in a bad month there would be no income. He used to send Rs 500 a month to his wife. He returned to the village last year after contracting tuberculosis. He also had some liver ailment. According to his factory health insurance card he was entitled to sickness benefits but has not received anything. However the company did arrange for his treatment. He hoped to recover soon, and be fit to migrate again. He claims that if he goes back to Vapi after he recovers he will be offered a job again. In his factory people came from all over India; he estimated that there were about 50 workers from Mahisham and neighbouring villages among them.

From Jaipur his brother Fulendra moved to Delhi, where he has been working ever since in a printing company where he earns between Rs 3,000 and Rs 5,500 per month. He sends Rs 1,000-1,200 per month to his wife and has been helping Surendra financially, since the latter's only source of income is leasing out the family land. Women of the family do only domestic work.

Surendra Jha and his wife did not go beyond primary education. He has completed class 6, and his wife class 3. His sons will study further; they are currently reading in class 9 and 5 respectively, in a government school.

The extended family compound consists of two separate houses facing each other, one in mud (Surendra, his wife and children) and one pucca (Fulendra's wife and children). The pucca house was constructed by Ugant Lal about 10 years ago, without any subsidy from the *Indira Awas Yojana* scheme. The family buys electricity from a private generator to light one bulb. The cost - Rs 50 per month - is covered by Fulendra. The bulb is located on the veranda of Fulendra's house, so it lights the courtyard as well. The two households share a handpump and a toilet (constructed through a government scheme) situated in the garden adjacent to the compound. Fulendra's wife has a mosquito net but not Surendra's family. Fulendra's wife Hira has a mobile phone. The family used to own a cow, but do not have any livestock any more.

The two brothers' families have separate kitchens. Indu Devi cooks pulses 4 times a week and vegetables twice a week. She grows her own vegetables. Fulendra's wife cooks pulses 3 times a week and vegetables 4 times a week. Her son buys the vegetables in the market. Fulendra's family consumes half a litre of milk a week and drinks lemon tea. The women have two saris each that they swap between themselves. They buy their own saris.

Surendra's treatment for TB ended a month before the interview. He was transferred from Vapi to the local hospital where he obtained his medicines. Fulendra's wife went to Delhi for two and a half months to consult for gynaecological problems. She will go again as treatment in the public hospital in Delhi is free. Neither Indu nor Hira had any check-up during their pregnancies. All the children were born at home with the help of a private nurse and have been vaccinated in the government hospital in Madhepur.

Surendra claims that the family did not take any loan. Instead land was sold when money was needed for the marriage of his daughter. However, there may have been a loan for the house; if so it was cancelled by the government.

Fulendra and his two married sons with their wives and children are living in Delhi but quite far from each other. Fulendra's wife talks to her sons and husband on the mobile phone. She only knows how to answer calls and how to switch off. She does not know how to make a call. The day previous to our visit she had received four calls and talked to her daughters in law and grand children. Her husband calls her at night.

Surendra felt that there had been some improvement over the last thirty years. Today adults have two meals daily, and children have breakfast as well. Pucca houses are more common. Earlier men and women wore cheap clothes, nowadays people wear fashionable and expensive clothes. On the other hand, the women of the family felt that the situation had not changed much over the last 10 years and Indu Devi pointed out that the family was better off when Surendra was a migrant.

ANNEX II: Village views**Mahisham**

Mahisham - Brahmin tola



Mahisham - poorer houses



Chandkura

Chandkura - village street



Chandkura – Scheduled Caste tola



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