Locating Women in Migration Studies: An Overview

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Theoretical formulations, model building, and macro- and micro-level empirical studies on migration have neglected the gender dimension of migratory processes, patterns, trends and consequences. The past two decades have begun to witness interest in this area. This introductory paper to this special issue on 'Women and Migration' has attempted to provide an overview of selected material in this area.

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A series of structural changes in the rural context, such as polarisation of landholdings, decay of cottage industries, mechanisation of agriculture; natural calamities such as droughts, floods, earthquakes; loss of sustenance due to faulty resource use patterns; large-scale evictions by mega-developmental projects and the resultant increase in inequalities have led to different migration patterns or spatial mobility. Rural-rural migration and rural-urban migration, especially among small and marginal farmers, landless and artisan castes is considered an important survival strategy that individuals and families adopt as a coping response to economic hardship. Migration studies have attempted to document different patterns of migration, the factors that cause migration and, to a certain extent, the impact of migration at the point of origin and destination.

The dimension of gender as a category for macro-data analysis and micro-level research in migration studies has acquired significance over the past decade. Women's studies research focuses on women as migrants with the family, single female migration, and women left behind due to male migration.
The Committee on the Status of Women in India (India, 1974) report contended that the number of deserted women is on the increase which is likely to lead to an increase in the migration of these women in search of livelihood. Research attempts over the past two decades have focused on incorporating the understanding that women contribute significantly to the survival of their households as associational migrants or as main providers for their families that are left behind by men. The limitations of various theoretical models, such as the 'push-pull model', the 'labour equilibration model', 'the Harriss-Todaro model' in the assumptions pertaining to modernisation, motivations, productivity, choices, decision-making, expected income differentials have also been examined critically from a gender perspective (Karlekar, 1995).

Macro-Level Studies
This paper attempts to review selected Indian studies that provide pointers to new dimensions explored through the gender lens, and also raise further research questions. Macro-level studies with decadel census data sets has always been the forte of demographers. The broad observation generated by these studies are reviewed here. The all-India data indicate a higher percentage of women migrating from rural-rural destinations compared to rural-urban destinations. The composition of female migrants in the rural-urban migration seems to be associated with the distance involved in migration and the size of the city. The evidence indicates that the larger the city the less likely are women to migrate (Premi, 1980). Guglar and Ferree (1983) observed that, sex-selectivity in city-ward migration and labour force participation varies according to the position of women as well as by major cultural regions. Women in the northern states, a region delineated in terms of the prevalence of exogamy, have lower participation rates in the urban labour force and in rural-urban migration. On the contrary, women from the southern states who supposedly enjoy a higher status, measured by such variables as infant mortality, literacy, age at marriage and fertility, are found in the urban labour force and also among rural-urban migrants. Based on the 1981 census data for India on female economic migration, Shanti (1993) observed that the proportion of female migrants to male migrants is higher for illiterates than for literates and this ratio is higher among marginal workers than among main workers. A comparison among different zones (Northern, Southern, Central and Eastern) indicates that the Southern zone shows better female mobility followed by the Eastern zone. Mobility among the educated is found
to be low, except in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. States with poor economic development have higher female mobility compared to some of the prosperous states.

Studies with macro-level data have also made observations on the changing trends in female migration and fertility (Bhatia and Sabagh, 1980; Halli, 1976) and the fertility status differences among North Indian and South Indian migrants (Guglar and Ferree, 1983) and so on. With all the limitations that pertain to macro-level data, the analysis in the aforementioned studies provide significant pointers to the role of economic and cultural variables in creating the preconditions for migration and in determining the types of migration patterns. However, there are glaring gaps in the assumptions revolving around women associational migrants, which has restrained research from contributing to urban and rural planning.

**Micro-Level Studies**

In the Indian context, studies on rural-urban migration are largely concentrated at the point of destination, that is, in the urban area. Therefore, there are relatively few studies on:

- the impact of the out-migration on the rural setting;
- the changes that take place among the rural households with remittances flowing-in;
- the characteristics of individuals or families that migrate as opposed to the families of an identical socioeconomic strata that remain;
- the different types of migration, namely, seasonal migration, circular migration, that families engage in and the reasons; and
- the changes in the agricultural production systems, landholding patterns, the use of forests and the village commons, and so on and its contribution to propelling people out of the village.

Conventional studies on migration that focus on the above mentioned themes barely touch upon the gender issue. The findings, analysis and discussions are restricted to socioeconomic variables such as, caste, occupation, income, family size, literacy, age, proximity to transport facilities, linkages with urban context. Issues such as sexual division of labour, domestic work burden, decision-making, changes in age at marriage, perceptions, consumption patterns, children's literacy, women's access to information, and the like, remain conspicuously absent.

Studies focusing on the rural end of migration provide insights into the economic marginality of households, male out-migration and the situation of women left behind. Urban studies on migrants of rural
origin document the concentration of migrant women in the lower rungs of the informal sector, their living situations, their shelter needs and priorities, their hopes and coping strategies. Some of the studies are discussed here under the following broad categories:

- the impact of male migration on women;
- rural-rural female migration; and
- migrant women at the urban destination.

**Male Migration to the Cities and Women Left Behind**

The specific reasons for rural-urban migration and the characteristics of migrants to the urban areas have been favourite subjects for research in migration. Single male migration leaving the women behind seems to be determined by factors such as availability of small patches of low productive lands, frequent droughts, presence of milch cattle, aged and young people within the family and cultural factors that impose restrictions on women's mobility. Some of these aspects are discussed here.

In India, there are certain regions which are considered to be migration endemic districts. Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg and Satara districts of the Konkan region in Maharashtra, Western India, send out several young able-bodied members to the city of Mumbai. Therefore, among the intrastate male migrants in Maharashtra a large percentage belong to these districts. The study of a village, Sugao, of Deccan Maharashtra by Dandekar (1986), focused on the women left behind. She observed that women constituted 75 per cent of the agricultural labour force in the village. Fifty per cent of the Sugao men work in Mumbai leaving their wives to look after children and attend to the lands. However, the power of the joint family, male kin and senior women over the younger women has not significantly reduced.

The hills regions of Kumaon and Garhwal in Uttar Pradesh have been migration endemic regions with males migrating to the cities of Delhi and Mumbai. The fuel crisis that has increased women's work burden within a difficult terrain, the 'money order' economy and women spearheading ecological struggles in the Uttar Pradesh (UP) hills have been the focus of research articles and observations from field notes (Swaminathan, 1984; Ratna Sudarshan, 1993). At present, the increase in male education and the lack of commensurate job opportunities in the hilly regions of UP, Garhwal and Kumaon is further propelling men to migrate. The women bear the brunt of agricultural production and maintenance of the households. The villages of UP also have a long history of single male migration to the
cities. The men generally participate in the urban service sector especially in milk supply, vegetable vending, rickshaw pulling and taxi-driving. Jetley (1984) has stated that the increase in women's work is unaccompanied by any significant change in their decision-making power within the family in UP villages. The love pangs and grief due to separation from the migrant husbands are reflected in the songs of the women from UP and Bihar (Saxena, 1977, cf. Karlekar, 1995).

Menon (1995) compared two types of migration — single male and family migration among the tribals of Orissa as emanating from two different economic systems. With the erosion of traditional male roles of hunting, warfare and protection, the Santhal men engage in single male migration, while the women carry out the traditional responsibilities of agriculture and domestic work. On the other hand, among the Santhals and Mundas, the traditional economy has been displaced by a non-tribal agrarian economy, resulting in their migrating as a household unit.

Gulati (1987; 1993) has documented the positive impact of international male migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries on women. The absence of men has created opportunities for women to manage their households, finances, investments, agriculture and children's schooling. Women have attained mobility in the public sphere. Women's education has received societal and religious support. However, depending on the age and relationship to the migrant worker, women face differing kinds of pressures, tensions and conflicts. Sekhar's (1996) study in two villages of Kerala analysed the international emigration of men and its impact on gender roles. The author observed that rather than family disintegration, male emigration could make women more capable, self-confident and independent. The husband's return had not necessarily reversed the participation of the women in the household decision-making.

The increase in work burden without commensurate growth of support structures, changes in the power structure and normative expectations from women, is bound to create physical and mental problems for women left behind. However, among the studies that focus on women left behind, this dimension has been least explored.

**Rural-Rural and Rural-Urban Female Migration**

The census data for all decades indicate the predominance of women in rural-rural migration streams. While much of this migration pattern may be attributed to patrilocal marriage practices and village exogamy, there is steady documentation of female migration between rural areas...
for securing work. Women and families migrate seasonally to villages where there are assured crops and work. Migrant workers from drought-prone regions are transported for transplantation and harvesting of paddy, sugarcane cutting, cotton, groundnut and tendu leaf picking in villages, to depress the wages of the local workers.

Studies that examined rural-rural migration are reviewed here to signify the importance of various factors like changing agricultural practices, land and labour utilisation patterns, in determining the migration of women within rural areas. Bardhan (1977), on the basis of Census and NSS data observed that the proportion of agricultural workers is particularly high among migrants from rural areas within the same district. Breman's (1985) study in South Gujarat plains found that 58 per cent of all seasonal migrants were women forming the inter-district and inter-state labour circulation. He draws attention to the increasing population pressure within an unfavourable ecological environment at the point of origin, and progressive social differentiation linked with a gradual penetration of the market economy, that is, the expansion of sugarcane farming and the emergence of a new agricultural cycle with assured irrigation, as major factors contributing to rural-rural migration.

Hema Kumari's (1984) study noted the regular seasonal migration of Scheduled Caste women within East Godavari district and between Guntur and West Godavari districts for paddy operations and also for work in the tobacco and sugarcane plantations. Women are preferred not only for their skills but because they are available at low wage rates. Rao's (1978) study has observed single women migrating to Karnataka, from Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh to work as graders. These women, as small children, migrated with their parents and in due course became independent earners and seasonal migrants. Lingam's (1988) comparative study of the drought prone and irrigated villages of East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, observed a large number of lower caste women from drought prone villages involved in 'survival' migration to the intensive rice-growing regions during the peak labour requirement season. On the other hand, women from middle and lower caste households from the intensive rice growing delta regions face competition from migrant contract workers at one level, but also aspire to attain upward mobility through migration. Similarly, Teerink (1995:292) has documented the seasonal survival migration of poor tribal (Bhil) households from Maharashtra to the sugarcane fields of southern Gujarat. The author reiterates
that 'capitalist penetration in agriculture has created a need for labour on a temporary basis and the establishment of a reserve labour force in times of economic growth' (Teerink (1995: 292). Women form a substantial part of this reserved labour, not only because of their specialised tasks and for their social reproductive activities for which they receive no remuneration. The study on seasonal out-migrating workers, especially women from the Chattisgarh region of Eastern Madhya Pradesh known locally as Sukhavasis (happy people) by Sen (1995), highlights the physical hardships, sexual vulnerability, lack of social security and access to services that migrants face at the point of destination.

The single female migration from rural to urban areas to work in the fish and prawn processing industries (Mathew, 1996; Saradamoni, 1995); into the sex industry in Calcutta (Dasgupta, n.d., cf. Karlekar, 1995); in Delhi (Gupta, 1990) demonstrate the lack of employment opportunities and the dire need to support families in the rural areas. It is being observed in recent years, that not only men, but women and children are making themselves available for 'petty' work and repairs in many cities at the chakla bazaars (casual labour markets) or nakas. A study in six towns Of Gujarat, in 1988, has shown that these labour markets are attended by men, women and children in the ratios of 6:3:1 (Punalekar and Patel, 1990:41, cf. Breman, 1996:46). In all these cases of single female migration or family migration, while women gain access to some means of income, the seasonal nature of their migration, the lack of unionisation and their dependence on the 'employer'/contractor' reinforces their subordinate status and increases their vulnerability.

Another stream of rural-rural or rural-urban migration is induced by displacement due to mega development projects like dams, construction of industrial estates or industries and the spilling over of cities into the urban fringes. Studies by Parasuraman (1995) to examine the impact of development projects that displace families, namely the Upper Krishna Irrigation Project in Karnataka and industrial projects in Maharashtra, unwaveringly recorded the social and economic marginalisation of families. Women were forced to engage in seasonal migration along with their men and children to Goa, Ratnagiri and Mumbai or were left behind to seek work in the neighbourhood.

Migrant Women in the Urban Context

Studies on migrant women living in slum communities are very few. In her study on women in the bastis of Delhi, Singh (1977) presents a
broad view of the consequences of urban poverty for women and the family. The study indicates a highly complex occupational specialisation based on religion, caste and region of origin. The significant findings are:

- the seeming relationship of the woman's traditional economic role in the family and the likelihood of her being able to adapt her skills to the urban situation;
- the concept of ritual pollution associated with traditional caste occupations carried over to urban occupations; and
- the low level of income and extraordinary work burden of women.

The study by Basu (1990), in a resettlement colony in Delhi, focuses on the contrasting cultural traditions of migrants from UP (North India) and Tamil Nadu (South India). The study observed that Tamil women are twice as likely to be literate and also employed when compared to UP women. The author observed that, even when the UP women earn, they have minimum interaction with the outside world, especially with men, whereas Tamil women consider more options and are the main breadwinners in the family. Although placed in the same socioeconomic level and external environment, there is higher child mortality and negative sex ratio among the UP migrants when compared to the Tamil Nadu migrants. Culturally, the South Indian women have greater freedom of movement and autonomy and hence there is more self-confidence among the Tamil women. Kasturi's (1990) study of Tamil migrants in Delhi observed that families migrated with the knowledge that women acquire work earlier than men. Male migrants are dependent on female earnings till they find work. Women's earnings are often higher than men's earnings besides being steadier. However, men exercise traditional superior rights over family income and enjoy greater independence than women. Migration to women meant an increase in the spatial mobility and various opportunities to savour urban life, which differs from their confined rural life in caste settlements. A study of Tamil domestic maids in Delhi by Rani and Kaul (1986) attempts to understand the pressures which push women out of their village — low wages coupled with recurrent drought and accumulating debts. Even though the migrants earn minimal wages and live in deplorable conditions, they wish to continue living in Delhi. Similar factors were identified by Reddy (1991) as forcing families to migrate to the city of Hyderabad to work on construction sites. The author also identifies social factors such as family feuds, village feuds,
marital problems, caste and religion related violence, inducing city ward migration.

Several studies that focus on women in the lower echelons of the informal sector unavoidably record that the majority of them have migrated from rural areas. Access to urban services like schools, hospitals, public distribution system and secure housing are the least for migrants. Studies have focused on the working conditions, quality of life, wage differentials and domestic life of construction and brick-kiln workers and gross non-adherence to legislation by contractors (National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988; Mathur, 1989; Nair, 1988; Pandey, 1993; Reddy, 1991; Sinha and Ranade, 1975). The preponderance of women and children from poor, lower caste migrant households in the rag-picking (garbage recycling) vocation, their plight and occupational health was documented by some (Shah, 1983; Pathare, 1995). Unlike the seasonal migrants to the city who share experiences similar to rural-rural migrants, the family migrants to the city operate through family networks, receive kinship support, gain entry into the informal sector and are more likely to settle down in the city.

While studies in this area provide insights into the gender dimension in migration a lot still needs to be explored, to affect planning urban and rural services from a gender perspective.

**Migrants and Health**

Single male migration whether rural-rural or rural-urban merits attention due to its close link to contracting and transmitting of STDs, HIV and AIDS as a result of risky sexual behaviour. Migration endemic regions in the country are seen as potential sites where disease is transmitted to the women left behind. Surveillance-, detection, follow-up, health education, counselling and care is a daunting task in the case of seasonal migrants. Migrants are not only susceptible to diseases existing in the host location but also carry disease vectors between point of origin and destination, which throws fresh challenges to disease control strategies. The resurgence of several vector borne communicable diseases, such as malaria, is a case in point. The health related aspects, closely linked to the spatial mobility of people, requires greater attention in migration studies. The studies have hardly focused on the expenditure on private health care among migrants who do not gain access to the public health system.
Contributions to this Issue

The paper by D.P. Singh, analyses the 1981 and 1991 Census data and observes migration patterns, reasons for migration and the work participation and literacy rates of migrants. The author observes a decline in migration over 1961 to 1991, higher illiteracy among inter-state migrants and lower work participation rates among women who give economic reasons for migration. Low levels of skill training, lack of employment opportunities and household status emerge as explanations for women's lower work participation in urban areas, through micro studies in this issue. The paper by Pandey recapitulates gender issues among rural-rural and rural-urban migrant labourers. The various work situations, in the rural-rural seasonal migration reveal the exploitative and vulnerable situation that these workers find themselves in. At the urban end, the paper identifies the constraints that migrant women face due to their domestic roles and lack of skills in seeking employment in the urban areas. The paper by Sundari and Rukmini examines the costs and benefits of female labour migration with reference to Tamil domestic (maids) workers in the city of New Delhi. The paper by Hema Kumari and Tataji provides a typology of different types, duration and distances of seasonal migration among women and households in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. Lingam's paper attempts to examine the different types of work participation, occupational mobility and the urban experiences of Telugu speaking low-income migrants in the city of Mumbai. The urban experience, the lack of support structures and gender aware urban planning and its impact on poor rural migrant women to the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, has been unfolded by Afsar. The experience of 'Nirman' an organisation that has attempted to evolve strategies to facilitate the reaching out of urban amenities and services to migrant construction workers, is narrated by Anand. This special issue contains an Annotated Bibliography by Lingam of 39 entries, to facilitate further research in this area.

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