This paper focuses on the gender dimension of migrant labour from Maharashtra. It examines two types of migrant workers — temporary (seasonal) and permanent and analyses the coping strategies and employment patterns of female migrants in the light of a changing socioeconomic order.

Dr. Divya Pandey retired as Reader from the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. She is currently working as a Consultant for SPARROW, Mumbai.

Introduction

Migration is both a cause and a consequence of various social, cultural and economic constraints experienced by the people in society. Migration in India is not a caste/class neutral process; it takes place in rich as well as poor classes. Rural elites migrate to the city for advanced education and subsequently take up urban jobs, adding to the family's wealth. They provide the capitalist base for agriculture to the parent family (Rao, 1973). On the other hand, poor peasants and tenants, landless labourers, marginal groups and poor artisans migrate to the big villages, towns and cities in order to avoid unemployment. The main causes of migration among tribals are growing landlessness and alienation from their land and denial of usufructuary rights in forests and forest produce.

Development planning and the processes of modernisation and urbanisation have affected the life and the work of the people significantly, particularly in the rural areas. Some recent studies have disclosed that a significant proportion of female migration in India takes place for economic reasons and, therefore, there is need for a closer analysis of the pattern of employment of the migrant women in the changed circumstances. What needs to be investigated is the employment status before and after migration of women and whether the
settlement in the new place has increased or decreased the chances of their employment. While economic factors are obviously basic to migration decisions, sociocultural factors shape the migration stream in the Indian setting. The act of migration is viewed as a collective strategy adjusting the household unit to external changes in the productive system (Wood, 1981). The Committee on the Status of Women has raised many questions relating to migrant women and a need for detailed investigation of the impact of broken marriages, widowhood, desertion and abandonment of women on migration. Such women may be migrating in order to earn their livelihood (India, 1974: 34-35). Similarly, social and cultural factors related to caste and region have important implications for decisions to migrate or not to migrate and for the consequences of migration for women, especially in terms of their pattern of workforce participation in the city (Singh, 1978).

There is considerable variation in the migration patterns of women all over India. Since marriage in India is an almost universal social institution, characterised usually by the patrilocal system of residence for females after marriage, migration becomes an inevitable phenomenon in the life of a woman. Virilocal residence is generally the cause of the preponderance of female out-migration in rural-rural migration and underscores migration of females for work. Thus sex, age and employment differentials in migration require detailed investigation. Available data on migration does not adequately explain in detail the pattern of female migration in India, who migrates and why, its impact on their employment needs and the consequences of these on their lives. Therefore, an enquiry into these aspects would be useful for policy relevance.

**The Focus**

While work is the overriding cause of migration for the poor households, the opportunities available to the poor migrant women in terms of employment, the implications of different types of migration, the experiences of the process of mobility, the nature of hardships and the consequences of these will differ substantially. The present paper attempts to focus on these aspects by examining two types of migrant workers — the temporary (seasonal) and permanent.

This paper is based on two independent studies carried out by the author. For the study of migrant labour and gender dimension (Pandey, 1993), five groups of migrant workers engaged in different activities such as brick kiln work, construction, crop-cutting and tile-making from different parts of Maharashtra were identified.
1. A construction site in Mumbai was selected for the study. The construction workers in Mumbai came from various drought-prone areas of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The majority, however, were from the villages near Solapur, Maharashtra.

2. A tile factory situated in the village Adeli, Vengurla taluka of Sindhudurg district, was chosen to study the impact of temporary migration on the Lamani tribals who were migrants from Solapur.

3. Migrant workers in brick-kiln work.

4. Migrant workers in crop-cutting in Dahanu taluka of Thane district was made to examine the problems of Warli tribal labourers who came to work there from the interiors of Thane district.

5. The fifth group of the migrant stream consisted of cane-bamboo artisans. They have migrated from different parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and have now settled in Mumbai. They continue their traditional, caste-based occupation which is run as a household industry with family labour.

The second factor for choosing these groups was that in all of them, not just the men, but the family as a whole migrated in search of employment. Both men and women work together and are employed on a temporary basis in manual or semi-skilled jobs in the unorganised sector of the economy through middlemen. Women are not supplementary earners in such a context but are the basic support for the survival of the family. The study attempted to seek answers to the following research questions:

- What kind of constraints are posed for women in this temporary kind of migration?
- How do women cope with this situation?

It would be necessary to look into the effects on the status of women who have migrated along with their husbands for work. This study was limited to a one-point enquiry based on the work site of the migrants.

The observations on permanent migrants has been drawn from a study of three slums in Mumbai carried out by the author (Pandey, 1996). The focus of the slum study was on the importance of the neighbourhood areas surrounding the slum in offering job opportunities to women. The research questions of the study are:
• How do these poor women after migrating to Mumbai integrate themselves with the urban surroundings to fulfil their basic needs and priorities?
• How do women cope with their struggle for survival?
• Do women's mobility, which is restricted due to many familial responsibilities and constraints, come in the way of gainful employment?
• Do they accept whatever work they can get in the vicinity of the slum?
• Do their low levels of education and skills limit their opportunities for alternatives in the neighbourhood?
• Do their multiple roles pose considerable physical and mental hardships for the women?
• What are the terms and conditions of their employment? Are they concentrated in the urban informal and private sector service?
• What security of jobs do they have?

Profile of Seasonal Women Migrant Workers

Most of the migrant workers were in the middle of their working span (15-45 age group). The average age of the migrant women was around 29.5 years. Except for 12 construction workers who belonged to the Scheduled Castes, the rest (48) belonged to Scheduled Tribes. They came from very poor households. Sixty-three per cent had no land in the village. Only 22 households had a few acres of land in the village which was looked after by their relatives. The vast majority of the migrant women were illiterate. Only ten women from the sample had some schooling. A majority of the migrant women were married and they migrated with their families. Most of them lived in nuclear families. Four widows and three separated women stayed at the work site either with their respective parents or some relative on their natal side. In some households, children above the age of ten worked and contributed to the household income. The average size of the migrant worker's household was 5.15.

The nature of work done by the migrant women did not vary much despite the fact that they were engaged in different occupations. Women, in three of the five groups, were head-load transporters in construction, brick kiln and tile-making. The crop-cutting women workers had to stand all day in the fields to clean the husk. The cane-bamboo craft workers had to work seated in one position for long periods of time. Except cane-bamboo artisans who were
self-employed, others engaged in wage work. Their work was tedious and monotonous, unskilled in most cases and strenuous, leaving them totally exhausted at the end of the day.

**Employment and Earnings**

Nearly half of the migrants worked on a daily basis. Their daily working hours varied between eight to twelve hours. The percentage of the workers on daily, weekly and monthly basis was 46.67, 21.67 and 31.66 respectively. Forty per cent of the women received payment for their work from the employer, while in the case of 36.67 per cent of the women, though the payment was to the pair consisting of the husband and wife, it was actually paid to the husband on the pair's behalf. In 6.67 per cent cases, the family was the unit of payment where the husband, wife and children worked, and the man received payment on behalf of all of them. Ten cane-bamboo workers were self-employed in a home-based family enterprise where men were in total control from start to finish. Women were never paid for their labour. Men sold the products, purchased fresh raw material, articles for consumption and kept the rest of the money for themselves.

**Migration Pattern**

Except for the ten cane-bamboo workers who have settled in Mumbai, the rest were seasonal migrants migrating to the same place year after year, doing the same work. The duration of the migration period varied, but in the majority of the cases it was between seven to eight months. The main reasons for migration were poverty, loss of tribal agricultural land in the village, lack of alternative sources of local employment, inadequate earnings from self-employment and the contract signed by the community for getting consumption loans from the employers in times of scarcity. To honour the contract, many of them came to the same job and worked with the same employer, year after year. Others who were not compelled by any bond, migrated due to poverty and the unavailability of jobs in various drought-prone areas of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The migration pattern affected the adjustment pattern of the migrants to the new situation. The seasonal migrants stayed in small huts, close to the work site. They faced innumerable problems such as housing, water shortage, facilities for marketing and health and schooling of their children.
The cane-bamboo craft workers were self-employed and carried on their traditional work independently after migrating to Mumbai. They are now permanent residents of Mumbai. The group consisted of both first and second generation migrants and their perception of migration varied sharply from the other groups. They also had different problems, most of them relating to their jobs. These artisans operated on their own without any external support. They urgently needed a place to carry on their work in the absence of which, they worked on the public roads, constantly in fear of eviction by the police. Bamboo workers had to pay fixed *haftas* (bribes) to the policemen for being allowed to work on the road. Though migration had provided them opportunities to earn a living, to educate their children, to see new places and to establish new contacts; the lack of proper housing remained the biggest problem.

**Gender Differentials**

It was more economical for the employers to contract the work to pairs as they got more work for less money. Employers found women more responsible than men and insisted on job contracts for pairs. Some jobs were typically women's jobs as these were very monotonous and arduous, and few men were available to do these jobs. Besides, more and more women were forced to support themselves and turned to migration out of desperation arising from the insufficient wages they earned in the villages. Family contracts received more payment because of the help rendered by children.

Despite the fact that the jobs were normally contracted out to a husband and wife pair in brick kilns, construction and tile-making, the wife had no control over her earnings. The women were solely responsible for the housework. Housework is not considered as work but a woman's responsibility. They did the household chores and looked after the children. Besides, they had to fetch water which was a hard daily ritual.

Men interacted with other people at the work site and were able to socialise outside the family and the community group with the locals at the tea, ration or barber's shops. The women were so overburdened that they hardly had any time for any sociocultural activities.

The crop-cutting women workers were thoroughly exploited, treated like animals and made to feel inferior by the rich farmers who employed them. The farmers organised the men to do mechanised threshing. Under this process, the paddy is not properly dehusked; it
retains a part of the rice which poses a problem for the farmer as he has a ready market for the fully cleaned husk. As changing the machinery would incur considerable expenditure, they used poor women who traditionally did this kind of work. They persuaded the men who worked on the husking machines to bring their wives and thus the women started migrating with their husbands. It suited the farmers as no local men or women would agree to take on this tedious back-breaking job.

What did the women workers get at the end of a hard day's work, picking and searching for grains of rice in a huge heap of husks? 'Take whatever you get' was the generous offer made by the farmers. The women could collect two bags of rice each weighing 100 kg. during the working season of four months. This was the only payment they received. Many women said, 'Sometimes we clean husks which can fill up a whole lorry, but we get only one-fifth or a quarter of a bag of rice. It is very difficult, tedious and monotonous work and we do it because we have no alternative'. They had to depend on their husband's earnings as the rice they collected was used for family consumption. These women were able to perceive the gender differentials and articulate them. Men, they said, were always employed in jobs where there were some chances of promotion, but it was not so for the women. Beside men received their payment in cash and had control over their earnings. Women's jobs were always repetitive, unskilled and also low-paid.

The women involved in the cane and bamboo craft family enterprise were well aware of the gender differentials. They never got paid for their work individually even though as members of the family they helped in the production process. Women could not exercise any control over the money. One woman said, 'We have all the responsibilities and they have all the money'. This also had consequences on household decision-making.

Men and women migrated in pairs though the nature of work they did differed. In the tile factory, the women carried clay and put them into the machine as well as dried them, while men cut them into the required pattern and baked them. The employers' justification for wage differentials (men: Rs. 20-25, women: Rs. 10-15, and children: Rs. 10 per day) was the difference in job content. According to them, the women's work was lighter, so they were paid less than the men who did the heavier work. The *mukadam* (overseer) who is always the man from their own community maintained that it did not matter, because the money was eventually spent on the household.
Promotion figured nowhere for the women, as one woman pointed out.

Women can never become *mukadams*. It is only men who do this work as they are able to exercise control. Besides, only men have the option to become skilled workers, not women'.

Therein lies their vulnerability as they can easily be replaced. The jobs were clearly specified by the *mukadam*, to which the owners agreed. The heavy work of maintaining the kilns and machines was given to the men while women were spared for the 'lighter' work of carrying mud to the machines. One could see that the women's jobs were unskilled, but how did it become lighter? They were on their feet all day, carrying heavy loads on their heads. Many women said, 'We do more work because we work in the house as well as earning a living. Our husbands do not help in the housework'.

The gender differentials were very clearly demarcated in the construction industry with regard to the nature of the work done by the men and women as well as the payment of wages received, though both put in the same hours of work and did almost equally tiring work. In the building industries in the big cities, the contractors held sway over the pattern of hiring and firing the workers. The jobs for women and men were quite clearly defined. Women were employed only as unskilled labourers. The tasks assigned to them were carrying soil, mortar or bricks, crushing bricks and working on hand pumps.

Some of the women were the sole providers of the household. One of them remarked, 'I earn Rs. 13 per day while a man would earn Rs. 19 for the same work. Although I am the sole parent and have to support my children, I suffer because I am a woman'.

This story was common to most of the women deserted by their husbands. It is a wonder how they run their families with the income they earn. They were unable to comprehend why the employers paid the men more when both did equally tiring work and put in the same hours. The notion that the woman's income only supplements the family income is widely prevalent and this accounted for their low income.

In the brick industry, there was a very rigid compartmentalisation of work on the basis of sex. Women worked as unskilled workers carrying head loads or stamped the squelchy mud through the night. Jobs such as moulding, shaping, stacking and arranging in the kiln are exclusively male jobs. There was a clear difference in the wages paid to men and women, but it was not perceived as such by these tribal women because of class exploitation and grinding poverty.
Migrant Labour, Employment and Gender Dimensions

Occupational Health Hazards

Women suffered occupational health hazards due to poor working conditions. Body aches, skin irritation and sunstrokes were common occurrences. The main work related problem for the brick kiln and tile factory women workers seemed to be the timings and the intensity of their activity. At the end of the day's work, their feet were too strained to be able to walk. Cramps in the legs were also common due to continuously working in one position. Skin infection and blisters occurred frequently due to working in the mud for long periods of time. Accidents often took place when pieces of glass, sharp stones or other foreign bodies were found in the soil. The employers made no provisions for first-aid or help of any kind. The cut or bruise was treated locally and the women resumed their work almost immediately as the work target has to be achieved. It was the hours of work which mattered as they were all piece-rate workers.

Speaking of minor accidents at the construction site, the women construction workers said, 'Very often stones fall on our feet while the construction is going on. They are small stones, but they hurt a lot and since we are supposed to be working, we cannot attend to it till we come home. After reaching home, there are the household chores to attend to, so we have no time to pay attention to the wound. Thus, it is invariably shelved'.
and applied some heated oil and left it open. In cases of major injuries, they went to a doctor. The older women complained of breathing problems due to pollution on the site.

The crop-cutting women workers revealed that health problems such as aches in the body and sunburn due to working in the heat the whole day were routine. Respiratory problems and allergies arising out of breathing in and working with the husks were also cited. Sometimes, the husks would get into their eyes and lead to inflammation.

The cane and bamboo craft workers also faced many health problems. Constantly working with the bamboos caused skin irritation. Besides the sharp bamboo strips made lacerations. They felt giddy, working as they did in the sun the whole day without any cover to protect them. Pregnant women could not work for a long time at a stretch. They said, 'Women have to sit for long periods to work and this is very tiring. Our backs hurt much more than for men'.

Pregnant women continued to work as the family could not function without their earnings. Women frequently faced both pre-natal and post-natal complications and more so during their later pregnancies. All of them had their babies at home, depending on some experienced women to help. These were perceived as women's problems. Some women complained of heavy menstrual flow due to the back breaking labour expected from them.

The women also mentioned that ill health affected their efficiency directly and their wages indirectly. The dreary monotonous work sapped their energy even more. It was of prime importance that the contract should be completed. Therefore, the women, though ill, continued to work slowly but for longer hours. Their husbands too did not like it when they missed work, as the income would be drastically reduced.

**Impact on Children's Lives**

The women brought their children along with them when they migrated for work. Most women wanted their children to be with them instead of leaving them behind in the village as they were illiterate and for the eight months they would be away, they would not be able to communicate with them. They found it more useful to bring the elder children with them so that they could work and help with the housework too. The parents were at work the whole day and the children were left to fend for themselves. The younger ones played around the work site, slept or watched their parents work. There were no facilities
of a creche near their work site, though women felt it was most necessary considering the nature and hours of work. Only the construction workers in Mumbai had the facilities provided by an NGO: Mobile Creches at the work site.

**Migration Effects**

All migrants felt that migration had helped them to get jobs in order to survive, though the hours of work were much longer than what they were used to in their village. The brick kiln workers worked at very odd hours, that is, throughout the night. The women found it more difficult as their entire lifestyle underwent a restructuring during the seven to eight months and their children had to be left alone when they went to work at night. The work of all migrant workers was difficult compared to their traditional agricultural work in the village.

Migration has literally saved these workers from starvation. It has given them a livelihood, a way to survive between the two agricultural seasons. Today, it has become a part of their lives and the place of migration, their second home. Their standard of living, however, has not improved in any way by this seasonal migration. They do feel unhappy to leave their villages and often worry and miss their relatives whom they left behind.

Most of the migrants in rural areas have very limited interaction with the local people. The locals generally treat them as outsiders and do not make any efforts to interact with them socially or try to understand them. Their ways are alien to the locals and though there is no hostility as such, the language barrier is felt very often. When migration to the same work place becomes a regular phenomenon, year after year, the migrants gradually learn the language and interact with the local people.

Lack of work opportunities led these landless tribal women to the unskilled and unhygienic work in brick kilns and tile making. Most women said, 'We don't want to do this work, but we are forced into doing it because of our circumstances'. With no education, skills or contacts, they turn to it as a last resort. The tribal families usually migrated in a group, which provided security and a sense of well-being. Adjustment was thus easier and a certain degree of, stability was ensured.

**Profile of Permanent Migrant Workers**

A study of three slums in Mumbai located at three different sites having different neighbourhoods — Jaifalwadi (Mumbai Central),
Prem Nagar (Vile Parle), and Gautam Nagar (Andheri East, Marol) — comprising 1249 households revealed many important aspects of the urban poor, who were basically migrants from rural areas. It was interesting to note how the women migrants made use of the opportunities their neighbourhood offered them. Mumbai, an important industrial, business and commercial centre is an 'oasis of opportunities' created by the expansion of an informal sector of economy and it is the need of industry and commerce for casual labour which attracts the rural poor to Mumbai.

**Migration Pattern**

A survey of 338 families of hut-dwellers in Jaifalwadi slum showed that 77 per cent of them had migrated from Maharashtra and another 15 per cent from Gujarat. The rest of them came to Mumbai from other states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, and Andhra Pradesh.

The slum-dwellers of Gautam Nagar came from all over India as revealed by a household survey of 471 huts in Gautam Nagar. In all, 64 places were recorded in our survey as areas of out-migration to Mumbai. Seventy households belonged to the Gulbarga district in Karnataka.

Out of a total sample of 440 in Prem Nagar slum, 259 (58.9 per cent) had migrated to Mumbai from Maharashtra, while others came from various states of India. A majority of them migrated to Mumbai from Uttar Pradesh (57), Gujarat (45), Karnataka (21), Tamil Nadu (19) and Andhra Pradesh (13). The remaining migrants came from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and Bihar.

The process of migration was more or less similar for the hut-dwellers of all the three slums. One male member from a family migrated in search of a job because of dire economic necessity. In most of the households, the head of the household himself made the decision to migrate. He was helped by some of the village people and relatives in the village and in Mumbai. In some households, other family members like the father or brother had taken the decision to migrate and joined them later.

Some households in these slums were second generation migrants and now consider Mumbai as their place of origin. Their parents had come to Mumbai in search of jobs and gradually, the entire family shifted.

Our data also revealed that the interval between the migration of the husband and the wife has reduced among recent migrants. A few households had migrated as a family unit and gradually settled in
Migrant Labour, Employment and Gender Dimensions

Mumbai. The earlier pattern of migrants coming alone to the city for employment and wives following them at a later stage, or not being able to join their husbands for long periods is gradually changing (Desai, 1990:240-41). The average period of residence in Mumbai for the Jaifalwadi and Prem Nagar slum-dwellers was quite similar that is, 32 and 30 years respectively. The average number of years in Mumbai for the Gautam Nagar slum-dwellers turned out to be lower compared to the other slums — 17.6 years. More and more permanent migrants are becoming Mumbaites. Thirty per cent of Prem Nagar residents had no contacts with their native places. Similar figures for the Jaifalwadi and Gautam Nagar slums were 21.6 and 19 per cent respectively.

Characteristics of the Migrants

Most of them were landless labourers, daily wage earners or marginal farmers in their villages. A substantial proportion of these migrants belonged to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). However, in Jaifalwadi, Marathas were the single largest caste group. About 123 households were Marathas, followed by Chambar (36), Vanjari (31) and Kunbi (23) respectively. Apart from the above caste groups, various others also lived in this slum. While in Gautam Nagar, the SCs' concentration was the highest (41 per cent), there were Scheduled Tribes (13.4 percent) and OBCs (11.3 percent) also. The percentage of the households belonging to the other castes and Muslims were 27.5 and 6.8 respectively. Prem Nagar also had the highest number of households (121) belonging to Marathas, as was the case in Jaifalwadi, followed by 111 SCs and 47 OBCs. Slums are generally composed of the lowest castes in the urban centres, but the presence of the other caste groups shows that class seemed to be an important category in certain Mumbai slums.

The slums were marked by a high degree of heterogeneity. Various caste, language and religious groups were represented. The predominance of certain caste groups indicates that in an alien environment, the migrants preferred to stay together with close kinship, caste or village networks for support.

Migrants came to Mumbai from within the state as well as from other states of India. The Marathi-speaking population dominated in all the three slums; their proportion was much higher in Jaifalwadi which had three-fourths Marathi-speaking households compared to 55 per cent in the other two slums. Next in order, Gujarati and Hindi-speaking households predominated in Jaifalwadi and Prem
Nagar in varying proportions; Gautam Nagar had more Hindi-, Telugu- and Kannada-speaking populations.

Migrants moved in response to considerable information provided through kinship network about formal and informal sector jobs. They were engaged in doing very hard, manual and arduous jobs in the informal sector of the economy. It was also noticed that migrants from certain states were concentrated in particular occupations. The earlier migrants from certain states helped the recent migrants to get similar jobs in Mumbai. Nepalese were found working as chaukidars (watchmen) in residential buildings and factories. People from Karnataka tended to gravitate towards construction activity. Some migrant groups were recruited by the labour contractors from their own areas. Many Maharashtrians from the Ghat region were engaged in factory work or in the service sector. Though the caste identity provided the basis for social organisations in the city, the village and regional ties were an important link in the slums. They were primarily introduced as UP-walas or Nepali or Madrasi or Ghati to signify their identity among different groups.

Most of the working age group population within these poor households were on the look-out for some kind of employment. Constant efforts were made to seek jobs of various kinds to increase their earnings. A large number of the slum population was in the lower age group. The percentage of the employed population in Jaifalwadi — 68.9 per cent for males and 31.1 per cent for females — was quite comparable to 69.7 per cent for males and 30.3 per cent for females in Prem Nagar. Lesser employment of females in Gautam Nagar (17.8 per cent) was reflected in a higher percentage of employed males (82.2 per cent) in this slum. The average income of the family ranged between Rs. 1,368/- in Prem Nagar to Rs. 1,835/- in Jaifalwadi. The per capita income varied according to the size of the family — the lowest (Rs. 310.68/-) in Jaifalwadi, Rs.315.20/- in Prem Nagar and a little higher in Gautam Nagar (Rs. 321.11/-). For migrants, lack of skills, lack of contacts, the immediate need for a job, forced them to take up odd jobs, resulting in lesser payments.

**Job Opportunities**
The slum families had adopted different survival strategies depending upon the work opportunities available in the neighbourhood. Many of them prefered walking for nearly 30-35 minutes to their workplace and avoided using public transport facilities as they could not afford it except...
in an emergency. In the vicinity of Jaifalwadi, there are big commercial and business centres as well as a posh residential area. The men were employed in private offices and business houses in different capacities as clerks, supervisors, drivers, peons and workers. Some worked as coolies at the Mumbai Central railway terminus and a few were employed as drivers and conductors in the State Transport depot close by.

Most women worked as housemaids and provided other services to the neighbourhood such as carrying lunch/meal boxes to school children, cleaning offices and fetching drinking water for shops and offices. Some were engaged as *khanawalis* (women who cook food at their homes for a certain number of boarders on a monthly basis. The boarders could either come to eat there or the 'tiffin' is sent to their workplace) and ran petty businesses in the slum. Some young unmarried educated girls (8 per cent) were able to get jobs in beauty parlours and offices with a weekly off. Some were engaged in tailoring. Women with children were engaged in part-time jobs in the vicinity in order to carry out their multiple roles.

Prem Nagar is situated in one of the better western suburbs — Vile Parle. In the slum neighbourhood, there are residential flats, hospitals, educational institutions, hotels and restaurants. The menfolk worked as labourers, peons, sweepers, watchmen, ward boys, waiters, electricians and clerks. Women were mainly engaged as housemaids. Some worked as *ayahs*, sweepers and a few were self-employed at embroidery work, tailoring, basket weaving, colouring of bangles, and so on. Some supplied milk to the neighbourhood households, conveyed young children to school and picked them up on their way back home.

Gautam Nagar is very close to an industrial estate. Many of the men and women worked mainly as construction workers and daily labourers. Men were also employed as wiremen, salesmen, watchmen, mechanics, plumbers, electricians, and so on. Very few women were employed as domestic servants or *ayahs* as compared to the Prem Nagar or Jaifalwadi slums. Some of them were low-paid piece-rate home workers. A small proportion — as in the other two slums — were also found to be in the vending and petty business.

The concentration of women in certain types of employment such as domestic labour, *khanawalis*, home-based production activities and pavement vending, indicate reinforcement of sex-segregation of work activities and the traditional role of women. Despite the acute necessity of the poor households, the restricted employment of poor migrant

---

*Migrant Labour, Employment and Gender Dimensions 757*
slum women showed that it was not easier for women to get even temporary, unskilled jobs in the unorganised sector because of their responsibilities on the home front.

**Impact of Migration on Women's Lives**

The studies of the urban poor in the slums have indicated that 'no study of urban poverty or enquiry into the economic structure of the slum family can be complete without identifying the role of women as one of the breadwinners of the family' (Jha, 1990: 237). Lack of opportunities, unsuitable working conditions, lack of creches in slums, are some of the important impediments in getting gainful employment for women but in the households where the female earnings were substantial, it has helped the household to have a better level of living (Rao, 1992). The major constraint that kept the slum dwelling women folk away from the job market was domestic chores. Another study observed that regular jobs were taken up only by childless, married women. The employment pattern makes it clear that almost all women were unskilled labourers. It also showed that the women worked only in the same area as they lived (Dalaya, 1978:43). Limited work participation may be due to restricted employment opportunities for women who are not trained in any skills. Besides, social norms on women working outside may be a curbing factor (Desai, 1990:246).

A ten per cent sample from each slum was selected keeping in mind the different socioeconomic categories of the working women in order to get an insight into their lives and working conditions. The following table reflects some of the diversities of selected women.

A number of women in slums were employed either due to family circumstances or to supplement the meagre earnings of the household, or both. Friends, neighbours and relatives, were chiefly instrumental in finding jobs for them. Very frequently, these women were the sole breadwinners in the family. The percentage of the female-headed households varied in different slums— 14.2 per cent in Jaifalwadi, 10.45 in Prem Nagar and 5 per cent in Gautam Nagar. Most of them were widows, a few were either separated or divorced. The poor economic status of the female-headed households coupled with their double burden had their impact on the women's health. They were at a greater risk due to poor water supply, unsanitary conditions, diseases and poverty.
### TABLE 2
Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Selected Women in three Slums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Prem Nagar</th>
<th>Gautam Nagar</th>
<th>Jaifalwadi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Years of Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of the Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maratha</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Castes</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Family Income (in Rupees)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-500</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-1000</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-3000</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3001-4000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above 5000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of earners in family</th>
<th>Prem Nagar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Migrant women were married at a very early age. After arriving in Mumbai, life in unfamiliar surroundings was not very easy. As their husbands were usually in low-paid, temporary jobs, women's employment became very crucial for the maintenance of the family. The choice of employment was limited by the high rate of illiteracy, heavy domestic duties and child care responsibilities. Migrant women also experienced other sociocultural constraints. The responsibility of managing the home was a major barrier in women's access to regular employment. Jobs in the formal sector of the economy involve fixed hours of work and are at a considerable distance from the home, thereby posing problems for these poor women who had no other alternative support system. A majority of them selected jobs because it was close to home and part-time in nature so that they could perform their multiple roles.

They could only manage to get unskilled jobs due to lack of education and other barriers. They worked for many hours in a day for which they got a minimal salary which was utilised for household expenses. Some women were willing to take the risk if they could find
alternatives. Some of them were willing to be trained in certain skills provided they were guaranteed a job. But a large number of unemployed women specified that they would prefer to work in their own homes. However, if child care was provided, more women were willing to work outside.

The job opportunities available in the vicinity of Gautam Nagar (surrounded by an industrial area) provided limited alternatives to young women with small children. They preferred two-three hours of work nearby so that they could come home in the afternoons to look after their young children. This accounts for the lower percentage of work participation of women from this slum as compared to the other two slums whose surroundings were conducive to women's employment as domestic helps. The only option open to women who could not venture out for gainful employment in nearby companies was self-employment. They attempted to diversify in limited ways by running a grocery shop from the house, vending vegetables close to the slum, tailoring, rag-picking, working as ayahs, undertaking ironing at home, preparing decorative tikkas (beauty spots worn on the forehead).

One did not see the patron-client relationship among the working women of Gautam Nagar as was seen among the domestic helps of Jaifalwadi and Prem Nagar as these women were mainly engaged in companies or worked either as piece-rate workers at home or as construction workers. Their association with their employers was only through middlemen or supervisors, and they had a strict working relationship with their employers. They thus faced considerable job insecurity, and unlike the maidservants, not only did they not get extra benefits in terms of food and clothes, but they could not approach their employers when they needed advice or support in difficult situations.

Women employed in garments, computer parts and umbrella manufacturing units worked in eight hour shifts on a temporary basis. Even though some of them had been working for as long as five years at the same job, they earned a pittance of Rs. 500 a month, and felt vulnerable as they were not part of a union, did not have the necessary contacts and needed their jobs desperately. Moreover, they had to hand over their entire pay to their husbands who were the decision-makers in the family. They received no help from their husbands in the running of the household. All the household chores had to be completed before they went to work. Their opinions were only sought on household matters such as children's education and their well-being. If the eldest
child was a girl, they considered it a stroke of good fortune, as she could be depended upon to help with the household chores and take care of the younger children. Her education, therefore, was very often curtailed. These girls, once married, go through the same kind of unskilled, low-paid, arduous jobs without any security and benefits because of their low educational status and poor socioeconomic status of their family. The migrant women, though uneducated themselves, understood the value of education. However, they could not afford to educate all their children. The women of Jaifalwadi, however, did their best to ensure their children's education, in the hope that it would lead to better job opportunities. They did not want their children to be employed in their type of work but in more respectable jobs. There are many cases in Jaifalwadi where children have completed degree courses and are working in banks, factories, the municipality, and other better paid permanent jobs. Many women of Jaifalwadi also cherish dreams of getting out of the slum quarters and buying houses in some residential area. They feel that this dream can be achieved by their children, through education and a decent job.

A majority of the women were employed as domestic helps. They claimed that their ability to negotiate their work timing was the best part of their job. Besides, it provided them with a monthly pay packet which was not possible in business and vending. Being illiterate, it was the best job that was available to them. Also, working in the vicinity saved them time, travel and money. In Jaifalwadi, it was noticed that many women have worked as housemaids in the same households for 15–20 years, some for ten years and some others for five years. Many of them, when working, had established a good rapport with their employers. They were given tea, snacks, and other food items besides cast-offs either clothes or other goods. During festivals, a month's salary was given as bonus, and/or a saree, and extra cash when there was extra work. Very often, they borrowed money from their employers which was adjusted against salary. They also got paid leave when they were sick or somebody in the family was unwell. At times, protection was also afforded, especially when the husband was addicted to drugs or alcohol, or there were instances of domestic violence. Quite a few domestic helps in these slums, however, were very cynical while describing their relationship with their memsahibs (women employer). Employers were less trusting than before and more suspicious and checked on them frequently.
The migrants in the Mumbai slums want to break through the vicious cycle of poverty, but illiteracy, low levels of skills and lack of options work against them. As a rule, women sought employment in the neighbouring area and ended up doing whatever their neighbours, friends, or relatives were doing. They could be viewed as the household's reserve workforce and got employed in unpleasant, tedious, low-paid work to ensure their families' survival. This highlights the need for employment, support services and empowerment of women in the slums.

**Conclusion**

This paper has focused on five different types of migrant groups in Maharashtra in order to examine the nature and types of migration of labour belonging to poor households where the family as a whole migrated in search of employment. It was found that in this temporary type of migration, the migrants worked in the unorganised sector without any legal protection or job security, with long hours, low wages and no facilities at all. The migrant women not only worked under unsanitary and unsafe conditions, but suffered all the disadvantages of blatant discrimination. They worked as bonded labourers year after year with the same employer. Migration studies need to focus on the situation of women, taking into account the special hardships they confront as mothers. They require child care facilities, family planning and health services and provisions for maternity leave. Education, health and training needs of their children were the major problems of the migrant women.

The study of three slums in Mumbai revealed that women who came from the villages of Maharashtra and other states to Mumbai either with their parents or husbands or joined them later, were compelled to work because of family circumstances and to supplement the low income of the household. They had to take up whatever jobs were available to them. They were equally hard pressed with difficulties and inconveniences in their daily lives. Combining several roles meant a lot of physical and mental hardship for the working women.

The seasonal migrants were offered jobs in their villages through the contractors. The work was taken up in pairs, mostly by the husband and wife, and sometimes if children also worked, the family was considered as the unit of payment. Family contract work received more payment because of the help rendered by the children. But the women migrants in Mumbai required support and help for getting regularly
paid jobs. Women liked working as maids as it offered regular pay, food and other advantages such as flexible timings. But unless someone sponsored or recommended them, they could not find employment as trust and character were very important in this job. Planners, policy-makers and the programme implementers for the upliftment of women should pay more attention to the employment of women in urban slums. The provision of creche facilities within the slum by the government will increase their participation in income generating activities. Lack of skills, education and limited opportunities for alternative jobs restricted their employment in the neighbourhood. Therefore skill development programmes should be given the highest priority. The self-employment programmes will need a collaboration amongst funding agencies, NGOs and government programmes.

Although migration is voluntary, it must be understood within the context of the wider socioeconomic and political forces that impel migration. Migration is greatly related to the development process and, therefore, there is a need for scientifically designed studies on migration to generate proper information on the types, streams, causes and effects necessary for policy-making to reduce the imbalances between rural and urban sectors and to avoid negative consequences of migration at the point of destination like population congestion, land encroachment, proliferation of slums, housing and other infrastructural inadequacies, environmental degradation and many other related social problems.

REFERENCES

Dalaya, C.K. 1978  
Slum and Social Change: A Case Study of a Metropolitan Slum, Mumbai: Centre for the Study of Social Change.

Desai, N. 1990  

India 1974  

Jha, S.S. 1990  

Pandey, D. 1993  
Migrant Labour and Gender Dimension: Micro Analysis of Gender Differentials in Migrant Workers (Monograph), Mumbai: Research Centre For Women’s Studies, SNDT Women’s University.
1996

Rao, D.V.

The Importance of Surrounding Neighbourhoods in the Survival Strategies of Women Slum Residents: A Study of Three Slums in Mumbai, (Monograph), Mumbai: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University.

1992

Shah, A.M.


1973

Singh, A.M.


1978

Wood, C.

Rural Urban Migration of Women among the Urban Poor in India: Causes and Consequences, Social Action, 28(4), 326-236.

1981