

# Gendered Mobility: Women Migrants and Work in Urban India

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This article focuses on the changing work profile of migrant women and the avenues available to them. The central question posed is whether women's post-urban continuation in the workforce as well as fresh work status destabilises any of the established stereotypical gendered codes woven around familial and domestic responsibilities and if caste, class and accessibility to human resources (education in particular) intersect with such codes.

Migration, a physical and social transaction, is also an instrument of cultural diffusion and social integration even though most of the earlier studies on migration are centred on its economical aspect. Often framed by men's experiences, such research ignores women's role therein.

## 1 Introduction

Census data show that there has been a progressive increase in female migration with a slight dip in the 1990s when overall migration also declined. The average annual growth rate of the migrant population over the last 30 years (1971-2001) was 2.12% – female migration showed a growth rate of 2.24% as compared to 1.85% for males during the same period. Rural females were most mobile although urban females have picked up over the decades (Figure 1, p 116).

Although marriage continues to be the predominant reason for the overwhelming presence of women amongst the migrants, the increase is also because of the gender-specific pattern of labour movement (Sassen-Koob 1984; Shanti 1991; Ghosh 2002). Of late, the emergence of nuclear families, increasing participation of educated women in activities outside homes and the changing pattern of consumption have resulted in demand for women-centred services such as domestic help, childcare giver and full-time home-based caretakers, etc (Majumdar 1980; Martin 2004; Pillai 2007).

This article focuses on the changing work profile of migrant women and the avenues available to them. Drawing from our academic and ideological position that it is the relational domain within which women's work needs to be placed, we look at migrant men and their work pattern even as women qua women remain our prime concern.

We argue that women's migration is not as parasitic as it is often thought to be. The central question posed is whether women's post-urban continuation in the workforce as well as fresh work status destabilises any of the established stereotypical gendered codes woven around familial and domestic responsibilities and if caste, class and access to human resource (education in particular) intersect with such codes. Our contention is that overall, as constituent players in the ongoing social processes that allow one to negotiate expanded economic as well as social spaces, migrating women seem to be contesting, even if marginally, some of the traditional social and caste constructs in making the moves.

## 2 Data Source and Methodology

For the present study, the unit level data of the National Sample Survey (Nss), 55th round (1999-2000) have been used, which is also the latest data available on migration. The study is confined

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to rural to urban and urban to urban migrants and to the working age population of 15-59 years (Table 1).

Women migrants have been categorised in two groups: (a) those working prior to and after migration, and (b) those who entered the labour market for the first time after migration.

Departing from the usual practice of considering only those women who reported “employment” as the reason for migration, our universe consists of women who were working at the time of migration whatever be the reported reasons for their migration. This is because usually in decisions regarding migration other reasons get prioritised over women’s status as workers since in many cases women themselves may not perceive their economic roles as significant. This is implicitly indicated in the statistics: although about 9% of the total urban women were working prior to migration, only 3% of the migrant women reported employment-related matters as a reason for their migration. Some of this invisibility is also because of the data limitations as the question on “reasons for migration” does not allow for multiple responses.

**3 Analytical Discussion**

The unit level data for the NSS 55th round shows that there were about 32% boys and men (henceforth men) and 55% of girls and women (henceforth women) migrants in the age group 15-59 in urban India. More than half of the women in urban India were classified as associational migrants (combining marriage and migration with parents or other earning member of the family). However, as already indicated, our main engagement here is with migrants who were in the workforce even if the stated reasons for moving were at variance with their current work status.

**3.1 Post-Migration: Continuing and Discontinuing Work**

Overall, urban India recorded about 78.4% and 20.9% of men and women as workers, respectively. As far as migrants were concerned, 51.7% men and 9.3% women had reported themselves as workers at the time of migration. Post-migration, the workforce participation for men increased to 84%. For women, this increase has been 21%. Further, more than 60% of women who were working at the time of migration continued to work after migration (slightly less than 1% was looking for jobs and the rest had discontinued work) compared to their male counterparts where 97% men continued working after migration (Table 2).

When all age groups were taken into account, a significantly higher proportion of women who left work after migration were in the age cohorts of 20-39 years as compared to those who

continued to work after migration. However, within the 20-39 age-cohort those who continued to work after migration outnumbered those who opted out of the workforce (little more than 60% of the women remained in the workforce). Overall, a higher proportion of married women discontinued working (91%) in the post-migration period than those who continued working even after migration (83%). In contrast, 59% of all

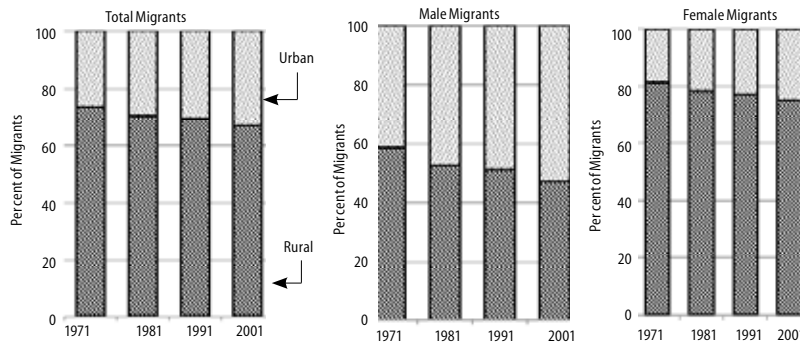
married women who continued to work belonged to the 20-39 age-cohort as compared to 41% who discontinued working. Thus, marriage and reproductive responsibilities seem to take precedence over work for women as a whole whenever necessary. For younger women, however, marriage

and work had to combine, either as an option or compulsion.

A proportionately higher percentage of women who discontinued working after migration were self-employed as unpaid household helpers before migrating to urban areas. This may be attributed to a combination of (a) relative blurring of boundaries between home and workplace in rural locations, and (b) fewer possibilities of being engaged in unpaid household work in urban locations. In contrast, just about half of regular salaried workers opted out of work as they moved from earlier residences to urban locations.

Overall, women did drop out of the workforce after migration and yet there were interesting differences across educational axes. As compared to those who continued to work in pre- and post-migration periods, the proportion of those who discontinued work after migration was higher among those educated up to or below secondary level relative to women with education beyond secondary level. This suggests that a certain threshold level of education is a prerequisite for women to continue working in the alien urban environs (Sachdev 2006). This

**Figure 1: Temporal Composition of Male and Female Migrants**



**Table 1: Migrant Population by Age Groups**

	0-14	15-59	60 and Above	Total
Male	14.6	77.5	7.9	100.0
Female	8.0	81.8	10.2	100.0
Total	10.6	80.1	9.3	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round, 1999-2000.

**Table 2: Continuing and Non-Continuing Migrant Workers by Age Groups**

Age Groups	Men		Women	
	Working Prior to and After Migration	Discontinued Work After Migration	Working Prior to and After Migration	Discontinued Work After Migration
15-19	2.3	2.5	2.5	3.3
20-29	18.5	7.3	23.1	33.1
30-39	33.0	5.6	35.0	31.9
40-49	30.0	16.2	26.0	16.9
50-59	16.2	68.4	13.4	14.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

is not to suggest a complete exclusion of illiterate women from the workforce, but as compared to 65% of illiterate migrant women as a whole, 76% of graduate and postgraduate migrant women continued to be in the workforce. Women with higher secondary education were the least affected group in terms of having to discontinue working in urban locations – 79% continued working while the rest opted out. The vulnerabilities of the labour market for migrant women thus seem to be particularly skewed in favour of those who were located at the extreme ends of the educational hierarchy (Schultz 1982; Kingdon and Unni 1997; Singh and Agrawal 1998; Jong 2000).<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3: Continuing and Non-Continuing Women Workers by Work Status, Educational Levels and Household Burden**

Work Status	Working Prior to and After Migration	Discontinued Work After Migration
Self-employed	28.9	43.8
(i) Own account worker	10.8	10.9
(ii) Employer	0.7	0.8
(iii) Unpaid household helper	17.4	32.1
Regular salaried	31.7	15.8
Casual labourers	39.4	40.3
Educational qualification		
Illiterates	52.0	50.4
Up to secondary	20.7	28.8
Higher secondary and above	20.9	11.2
All others	6.4	9.6
	100.0	100.0
Household Burden per woman (Based on dependent population age 0-6 and 60 and above)	8.20	10.43

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

Household responsibilities such as childcare and care for the aged are known to keep women away from formal employment. Although a crude measure, we looked at household dependencies on women workers by taking into account the number of child population (0-6 years) and old age population (60 and above years) as a proxy for each category of women, i e, (a) continuing work prior to and after migration, and (b) working prior to but discontinued after migration (Table 3). As expected, those who discontinued work in the post-migration period had a heavier dependency burden than those who continued working.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, men who left work after migration were mainly in the age group of 50-59 years. This could be due to the difficulties faced by older people in finding work once they move, coupled with barriers posed by ill health. Alternatively, as the data seem to suggest, the relatively better off could afford to leave their jobs whereas those at the lower socio-economic ladder were compelled to continue working – for example, slightly more than half of the men who left work after migration were in regular salaried jobs as compared to one-fourth in self-employment and one-fifth in casual labour. It may be recalled that 48% men and 91% women were non-workers at the time of migration. However, out of these, about 69% men and 16.8% women entered employment after migrating to urban areas.

### 3.2 Post-Migration: Continuing Workers and Fresh Entrants

The following section explicitly focuses on those whose status continued to be that of workers prior to and after migration as

well as those who entered the urban labour market for the first time. These workers are divided into three categories: self-employed, regular salaried and casual labour. Although the diversities within these categories make it difficult to assign any hierarchical order to the type of work, casual work can be considered as the most erratic sort of employment (due to the uncertainties involved) which the migrants are forced to undertake for survival. These workers have lower bargaining power and no social securities to cover them. If so, it is inevitable that the women casual workers would have even lower bargaining power with poorer working conditions and no prospects of upward mobility as compared to their male counterparts. This category is followed by self-employment in household enterprises as paid or unpaid labour. Here, the risk associated with the nature of employment is entirely borne by the self-employed person. It is often argued, particularly in official and masculine discourses that self-employed women, mainly working in household enterprises are protected from the many travails of the outside world and are therefore safer (Mazumdar 2004). However, scholars have routinely pointed out the work insecurities these women face (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003; Srivastava 2005). Thus, regular salaried jobs remain the best options available, with assured wages and various forms of social security cover.

Not surprisingly, the work statuses are intrinsically linked with education as illiteracy is much higher among the casual labourers (men 37.7%, women 82.5%) as compared to the self-employed (men 21.5%, women 59.1%) and regular salaried persons (men 6.9%, women 17.9%).

The nature of work changes because of differential opportunities in rural versus urban environs. The emergence of self-employment as a major avenue for women in general and for the first-time workers in particular needs to be framed in the larger societal environ which still sees women's primary location within domesticity, more so if they are married women – a point we have discussed later. That said, a prior work experience does seem to help women in expanding their chances in the labour market as those who were working at the time of migration were almost equally distributed across casual work, self-employment and salaried jobs after their move to urban

**Table 4: Urban Migrants and Their Pre- and Post-Work Status by Sex**

Workforce Participation	Men				Women			
	Working Prior to and After Migration			Fresh Entrants	Working Prior to and After Migration			Fresh Entrants
	Prior to Migration	After Migration	Percentage Increase or Decrease		Prior to Migration	After Migration	Percentage Increase or Decrease	
Self-employed	35.9	29.3	(-) 18.5	32.1	28.9	33.3	(+) 15.24	52.4
Regular salaried	40.5	56.4	(+) 39.06	57.7	31.7	35.1	(+) 10.65	28.3
Casual labourers	23.6	14.3	(-) 39.02	10.2	39.4	31.6	(-) 19.76	19.3
Total	100.0	100.0		100	100	100		100

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 5: Changes in Work Status of Urban Migrants in Pre- and Post-Migration Period**

Migration	After Migration							
	Men				Women			
	Self-Employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Labourer	Total	Self-Employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Labourer	Total
Self-employed	57.9	34.1	8.0	100	81.9	4.6	13.5	100
Regular salaried	7.6	91.2	1.2	100	4.9	93.9	1.2	100
Casual labourer	22.9	30.4	46.7	100	20.5	10.1	69.4	100

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 6: Urban Migrants by Educational Standard and Change in Occupation**

Before Migration	Men			Women		
	After Migration					
	Self-Employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Labourers	Self-Employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Labourers
Self-employed Illiterate	18.4	10.6	35.6	55.9	49.4	66.9
Literate	81.6	89.4	64.4	44.1	50.6	30.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Regular salaried						
Illiterate	7.9	3.1	14.3	20.1	8.6	69.7
Literate	92.1	96.9	85.7	79.9	91.4	15.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Casual labourers						
Illiterate	41.4	20.1	39.3	76.1	77	84.9
Literate	58.6	79.9	60.7	23.9	23.1	15.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

locations. In contrast, self-employment seemed to be the only “choice” that the first time women entrants had (Table 4, p 117).

**3.3 Shift in Pre- and Post-Migration: Continuing Work Status**

It can be seen (Table 5, p 117) that more than 50% of the migrant workers, both men and women continued to retain their pre-migration work status, be it self-employed or regular salaried – with the most vulnerable section being that of casual labourers. Nearly half of the men in regular salaried jobs moved on account of transfer of job/contracts whereas another three-fourth moved for better employment. As far as regular salaried women were concerned, about 40% had moved for reasons related to employment particularly on account of transfer of jobs and services followed by marriage.

One can thus see that women were no longer primarily associational migrants and their mobility was triggered by reasons other than marriage. Whether they were autonomous migrants is a vexed question because even if women migrate alone, the decision to migrate may well be a part of family strategy and therefore may not be truly autonomous (Chant 1996; Schenk-Sandbergen cited in Rao 2006).

So far the discussion was confined to workers with unchanged work status post-migration. In the subsequent section, we discuss the post-migration shifts that did happen across work categories.

One critical shift could have been from regular salary to casual labour, such a shift is not only negligible, but seems to decline in urban locations for both men and women, but more so for men (Srivastava and Bhattacharyya 2003). This is accompanied by increase in regular salaried jobs for some who were previously working as casual labour. This particular observation requires further study of workers who break through the casual workers’ status.

Ideally, we should have looked at educational levels, but because of the inadequate sample size at such disaggregation, we could group educational attainments in two broad categories only: illiterate and literate (Table 6).

Accordingly, the shift from casual work to regular salaried work was possible for those who were literate albeit usually to low-level/low-ranking jobs in manufacturing (44%), trade (17%) and transport (9%). Only 6% and 8% of self-employed and casual

labourers who moved to regular salaried jobs after migration were in public administration. These workers had a somewhat higher level of literacy – 71% and were educated up to the secondary level or below (about 27% with primary and middle level each) than those who continued as casual labour. A very high proportion of women workers (77%) were illiterate and most of them – as high as 63% – were domestic servants (Raghuram 2001; Pillai 2007). Thus, with education, a certain “upward” mobility could be seen.

**3.4 Continuing Workers and Fresh Entrants: A Comparison**

An industrial classification of workers in pre- and post-migration period reveals that prior to migration most of the self-employed migrants were engaged in primary activities such as agriculture. The very nature of urban areas restricts such activities and it is not surprising that after migration most of these men and women shift to manufacturing. Within manufacturing certain industries seem to have attracted them, i e, 56% of men and 67% of women were in food, textile, transport and communication industries. The fresh entrants to the workforce as self-employed were concentrated in manufacturing (one-third of men and women were in food processing), trade and transport. In case of regular salaried jobs, not much shift in pre- and post-migration status has been observed except in the case of men whose proportion has increased in manufacturing after migration. Public administration was an

**Table 7: Industrial Classification of Occupation of Urban Migrant Workers**

Work Status	Men			Women		
	Continuing Work			Continuing Work		
	Prior to Migration	After Migration	Fresh Entrants	Prior to Migration	After Migration	Fresh Entrants
Self-employed						
Agricultural and allied activities	48.9	6.0	3.6	35.9	21	26
Manufacturing	12.2	20.5	17.5	31.1	34.7	30.1
Construction	3.4	7.2	5.5	0.0	0.8	0.0
Trade, hotel and restaurants	24.7	42.2	45.8	17.2	27.8	30.3
Transport and communication	3.6	11.7	11.0	1.3	1.1	0.7
Education	0.7	2.3	3.1	1.1	1.8	5.1
Total <sup>a</sup>	93.5	89.8	86.4	86.6	87.2	92.1
Regular salaried						
Manufacturing	18.0	27.7	35.5	11.8	12.7	17.4
Trade, hotel and restaurants	17.5	12.2	17.9	8.6	2.8	3.6
Transport and communication	11.5	11.6	10.4	3.7	3.0	3.6
Public administration	27.3	23.4	13.6	17	16.6	9.2
Education	6.2	5.4	6.4	32.6	31.8	34.5
Health	2.9	2.8	1.9	13	12.7	8.3
Private households with employed persons	0.5	1.7	1.6	3.2	9.9	16.4
Total	84.0	84.9	87.2	90.0	89.4	93
Casual labourers						
Agricultural and allied activities	49.9	7.4	6.4	79.5	43.6	37.7
Manufacturing	9.4	20.2	25.3	1.8	8.3	12.9
Construction	19.9	42.1	36.9	9.4	26.4	22.6
Trade, hotel and restaurants	13.0	13.5	17.2	4.3	3.5	6.4
Transport and communication	4.9	9.4	7.7	1.3	0.0	0.5
Total	97.1	92.7	93.5	96.3	81.8	80.2

<sup>a</sup>Total comprises only those industries which employ maximum number of migrants.

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 8: Regular Salaried Migrant Workers in Educational Institutions/Organisations**

Education	Men		Women	
	Working Prior and After Migration	Working After Migration	Working Prior and After Migration	Working After Migration
Primary	19.8	24.0	48.7	53.3
Secondary (general)	45.5	35.4	37.7	36.9
Secondary (technical)	5.9	6.5	1.4	0.8
Adult education	1.6	0.7	0.5	1.5
Miscellaneous	27.2	33.4	11.7	7.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 9: Urban Migrants by Marital Status and Workforce Participation**

Workforce Participation	Men			Women		
	Never Married	Currently Married	Widowed and Divorced/ Separated	Never Married	Currently Married	Widowed and Divorced/ Separated
Self-employed	24.9	29.7	31.9	13.9	35.4	25.6
Regular salaried	53.0	56.8	51.0	68.3	35.0	26.7
Casual labourers	22.1	13.5	17.1	17.7	29.6	47.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

important avenue for regular salaried men and women. However, the proportion was higher for experienced workers as compared to those who were the first time entrants in the urban labour market (Table 7, p 118).

Salaried women were largely concentrated in the education sector whether they had prior experience of work or not. In the educational sector also, first time women workers were primarily confined to primary and secondary school teaching (Table 8) followed by services as domestic help (Yeoh et al 1999; Gulati 2006; Ogaya 2006).

As was the case with the self-employed workers, casual labour migrants were absorbed in the manufacturing sector following a decline in agricultural work (64% men and 54% of women are in the food processing and in textile industry). A large proportion of migrants who entered the labour market as casual labourers, were also absorbed in manufacturing, particularly in food processing and textiles. Both men and women had similar profiles. The construction industry is another employer of a large proportion of casual labourers.

Why migrants would have a propensity towards clustering in particular industries is an intriguing question. In the absence of corroborative evidences at this juncture, it can only be noted in passing that small-scale food industries and construction work are often the sites of close kinship networks that act as crucial sources of information for migrants. That such kinship ties exercise "quite a strong influence upon an individual's employment opportunities" has been observed in the context of urban labour markets (Harriss 1982: 997; Neve 2005).

### 3.5 Marriage, Work and Education

Given the essential constructs of marriage and marital responsibilities for women that often clash with their career paths and aspirations/compulsions to carve out independent existences, it is of interest to see how the two traverse. As indicated earlier, a move to cities does not necessarily mean that women can escape from their traditional roles. If so, one can hypothesise that the work status of women is necessarily intersected by

their marital status i e, higher proportion of married women would be self-employed where the work is based in household premises so that they can manage both productive and reproductive responsibilities as compared to unmarried ones who are relatively better positioned in terms of freedom of movement and time.<sup>3</sup>

A cross-classification of marital and work status of the migrants does show that as expected, the proportion of never married women engaged in regular salaried jobs was almost twice as that of married women (Table 9). This can also be due to their higher educational attainments, where 83% of these unmarried women were literate as against 49% of married women. A further break-up of data related to unmarried women who were in regular salaried jobs shows that more than 50% of them were educated up to the higher secondary and above level. Moreover, nearly all the unmarried women were full-time workers (96%) as compared to married women (88%).

That despite more and better opportunities on offer in urban areas, women cannot escape from stereotypical role expectations was borne out by yet another observation, i e, 88% of the self-employed women were married as against 83% and 78% of regular salaried and casual labourers respectively. It can be recalled that most of the married women in the salaried class belonged to younger age cohorts. It is also to be noted that in urban areas the work and home places are usually separate compared to rural areas so that urban-based women are often restricted in their ability to combine home and work as compared to their rural counterparts (Raju and Bagchi 1993; Mitra 2005; Agrawal 2006).

Nearly half of the widowed and divorced/separated women were casual workers. Also, around 83% of these casual workers were illiterate, working mainly in primary and secondary sectors (30% and 26%, respectively). This suggests that these women face multiple vulnerabilities – social as well as economic – and were compelled to accept any work for survival.

### 3.6 Social Group and Work

Socio-cultural factors play a crucial role in decision-making processes. Generally, historically poor and assetless communities who typically belong to lower castes and to tribes seem to have a greater propensity to move (Singh 1978; Berman 1996; Rogaly 1999; Deshingkar and Start 2003) although there exists insufficient understanding of how caste locations can enable or prevent people from gaining access to remunerative work through migration.

The present study categorised social groups into scheduled tribe (ST), scheduled caste (SC), other backward caste (OBC) and

**Table 10: Share of Total and Migrant Population by Social Group**

Social Group	Men		Women	
	Total Population	Migrant Population	Total Population	Migrant Population
Scheduled tribe	3.4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Scheduled caste	14.0	12.7	13.6	13.8
Other backward caste	30.7	28.6	31.0	31.8
Others	51.7	54.9	51.6	50.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 11: Migrant Workers and Non-Workers by Social Group**

Social Group	Men		Women	
	Working Prior and After Migration	Discontinued Work After Migration	Working Prior and After Migration	Discontinued Work After Migration
Scheduled tribe	4.1	0.54	8.2	7.2
Scheduled caste	13.2	12.4	20.2	20.7
Other backward caste	30.5	38.5	38.8	34.1
Others	52.2	48.5	32.8	38.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 12: Women Migrants by Social Group across Educational Standard**

Social Group	Illiterates	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary and Above	All Others	Total
ST	9.9	6.9	5.8	8.9	6.1	4.9	8.2
SC	30.3	14.9	9.9	7.9	6.8	13.5	20.2
OBC	44.4	47.7	42.2	33.3	18.2	54.9	38.8
Others	15.5	30.4	42.1	49.9	68.8	26.7	32.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

others – the social composition of the migrant population almost corresponds with the overall social composition of the population (Table 10, p 119).

It is often argued that the entry of “higher” caste women into the labour market is curtailed by their caste status because very often the behavioural codes for them are more restrictive in terms of approval/reticence towards their presence in public spheres (Srinivas 1977; Sundaram and Vanneman 2008). One can also argue that these women are relatively not as compelled to work as women coming from poorer families because of the caste/class overlap, even if imperfectly matched (Das and Desai 2003).

The data suggest that women belonging to obcs not only had the highest proportion of work force participation; fewer of them withdrew from work after migrating to urban areas (Table 11). Also, it is mostly the “others”– higher caste women who discontinued work after migrating to urban areas – an observation noted in earlier studies as well (Singh 1976; Das and Desai 2003).

However, a caveat is in order. We had observed earlier that highly educated women were least likely to withdraw from the labour market as a result of their migration to urban locations, which seems to be at odds with the observation here as the “other” higher caste women seem to be opting out of the workforce. What it shows is that contrary to the usual assumption of overlap between (high) caste and high education, the category of “highly educated women” contains educated women from castes other than the high castes alone (Table 12). In contrast, no such pattern was observed for the migrant men.

However, caste affiliation had a bearing on the work women would take up. Table 13 shows that the lower caste women were mainly confined to the lower rung of the job hierarchy while the “others” were mainly employed as regular salaried workers. A closer look, however, indicates an overall, albeit slight, increase in the proportion of regular salaried workers among the lower caste women including the srs, an outcome of better access to educational opportunities for these groups in urban locations (Raju 2008). In case of migrant men, other caste and st men were at the higher rung of the job scale whereas

men from the sc and obcs were in low paid jobs. Post-migration witnessed a major increase of migrants in regular salaried jobs within each strata of the society suggesting some sort of breakthrough of traditional caste barriers in the more anonymous and liberal urban environment although they continue to be concentrated in lower paid jobs. This was especially the case with women migrants.

### 3.7 Poverty and Migration

An association between poverty and women’s participation in paid work (Chen 1995; Mammen and Paxson 2000; Unni and Rani 2004) overshadowing other concerns such as childcare burden has also been talked about in literature (Sundaram and Tendulkar 2004) and yet the relationship between poverty and women’s participation in the labour market remains somewhat ambivalent.

In the absence of direct measurement of poverty and migration, monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) classes have been used. The lowest and the highest two consumption classes, i.e., Rs 0-300 and Rs 300-350 and Rs 1,500-1,925 and Rs 1,925 and above have been clubbed together to estimate the “poorest of the poor” and the “richest of the rich” migrants. Rural and urban locations denote the source regions from where men and women had migrated (Table 14).

This somewhat limited analysis seems to suggest that as compared to those in the highest consumption classes, the poorer people were more likely to migrate to urban areas (Kothari 2002; Omelaniuk 2005; Rao 2006). Whereas the difference between rural and urban men was not so significant in the poorest consumption classes, at the highest end of consumption classes, those who migrated belonged to urban backgrounds; almost a similar situation can be noted for women belonging to this income cohort. It is implied that urban to urban

**Table 13: Urban Migrant Workers by Social Group**

	Men				Women			
	Scheduled Tribe	Scheduled Caste	Other Backward Class	Others	Scheduled Tribe	Scheduled Caste	Other Backward Class	Others
Before migration								
Self-employed	21.6	29.6	37.2	39.0	33.3	23.6	32.3	28.0
Regular salaried	51.5	29.8	33.9	45.0	20.5	15.0	21.1	57.3
Casual labourers	26.9	40.6	28.9	15.9	46.3	61.4	46.6	14.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
After migration								
Self-employed	15.4	26.6	32.9	29.8	31.7	28.3	40.6	29.8
Regular salaried	64.8	45.3	49.0	61.4	24.5	20.7	25.6	58.1
Casual labourers	19.8	28.1	18.1	8.8	43.8	51.0	33.8	12.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 14: Urban Migrants by Place of Last Residence and the MPCE Classes**

Monthly Per Capita Consumption Classes	Men		Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Rs 0-350	28.6	26.0	41.7	30.0
Rs 1,500 and above	4.9	15.4	4.2	17.7
The rest	66.5	58.6	54.1	52.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 15: Migrants by Place of Residence, Work Status and MPCE Classes**

	Men				Women			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
	Before Migration	After Migration	Before Migration	After Migration	Before Migration	After Migration	Before Migration	After Migration
0-350								
Self-employed	39.3	30.7	25.6	27.8	28.0	32.6	27.9	30.7
Regular salaried	22.1	47.0	61.0	63.1	11.3	17.0	50.1	49.2
Casual labourers	38.6	22.3	13.4	9.1	60.7	50.4	22	20.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100	100
1,500 and above								
Self-employed	39.6	26.1	19.4	21.0	6.4*	4.1*	6.3*	11.4*
Regular salaried	51.5	69.8	79.0	78.6	75.9	94.0	93.2	88.6
Casual labourers	8.9	4.1	1.6	0.4	17.7*	1.9*	0.5*	0*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\*Sample size is not adequate.

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data of NSS, 55th Round 1999-2000.

migration in the highest income groups was not necessarily in search of better work opportunities and largely involved lateral movement, i.e., transfers across the income categories. This proposition is strengthened when seen in combination with the work status change of salaried men prior to and after migration (Table 15).

Regular salaried jobs had emerged as the main category of work for men after migrating to cities, but this observation has to be seen in terms of the kind of jobs they had. The main avenues open for poor rural men in regular salaried jobs were manufacturing (34%), trade and restaurants (13%) and transport (10%). Some of them were also employed in public administration (18.3%). The regular salaried rural men drawn from the upper cohort of the income group were mostly in public administration (28%), manufacturing (19%), and transport and in finance (about 10% each).

Since migrant men at the polar ends of consumption categories seemed to have a different trajectory in the urban labour market, a multinomial logistic regression is done based on the work status and the consumption classes.<sup>4</sup> A similar analysis could not be done for women because of the inadequate sample size.

The odds ratio shows that as compared to the richer sections of the migrants, poorer migrant men are more likely to work as casual labourers, i.e., the likelihood of poor migrants, both rural and urban to be in casual work is 4.9 and 5.9 times higher than the richer migrants respectively. Likewise, the richer migrants, independent of their rural or urban backgrounds, are more likely to be in regular salaried jobs. For example, the possibilities of poorer rural and urban migrants to be in regular salaried jobs are almost half of that of richer migrants (Table 16).

The nexus between poverty, restricted access to education and opportunities available in urban labour market is thus implicit.

### 3.8 Emerging Interdependencies and Their Implications

We began the discussion by saying that the nature of work done by the migrants, especially women, is determined by not only their status as migrants, but also by a host of factors such as education and marital status and membership in particular social and religious groups. A multinomial logistic regression shows how each of these factors plays out in influencing labour market outcomes for migrants.

It can be seen that the multinomial regression results endorse what we have already pointed out. The relationship between literacy/education and better employment avenues is clear, as the probability of literates to work as casual labour is much lower and educated workers are more likely to be in regular salaried jobs. This holds true for both the sexes. However, the likelihood of educated women being in regular salaried jobs is much higher as compared to men (Duraiswamy 2002).

Marital status does not constrain men as much as it does married women and yet an intriguing relationship emerges – currently married and widowed/divorced/separated men were less likely to be in casual work (48% and 52%, respectively) than the unmarried man. Quite possibly, the widowed/divorced/separated group would have had a longer trajectory of work history and may therefore no longer be in casual work whereas the currently married men had to move beyond casual work in order to get married – propositions that require study outside the domain of this data set. In case of women migrants in casual labour, the results are not at all significant. However, the likelihood of widowed and divorced/separated and married women to be in

**Table 16: Migrants by Place of Residence, MPCE Classes and Work Status: Multinomial Logistic Regression**

Dependent Variable	Factors	Odds Ratio	
		Rural Men	Urban Men
Casual labourers	0-350	4.903**	6.932**
	1,500 and above	-	-
Regular salaried	0-350	0.466**	0.496**
	1,500 and above	-	-

\*\*Significance level is less than equal to 0.001.

Source: Computed from the Unit Level Data, 55th Round 1999-2000.

**Table 17: Migrants and Associated Characteristics: Multinomial Logistic Regression**

	Factors	Odds Ratio Men	Odds Ratio Women
Casual labourers	Educational standard		
	Literates	0.475 **	0.374**
	Illiterates (ref)	-	-
	Marital status		
	Currently married	0.512*	1.498
	Widowed and divorced/separated	0.474**	0.878
	Never married (ref)	-	-
	Social group		
	Scheduled tribe	3.468	2.619**
	Scheduled caste	3.258	3.565**
Regular salaried	Other backward caste	1.737	1.274
	Others (ref)	-	-
	Educational standard		
	Literates	3.053**	8.292**
	Illiterates (ref)	-	-
	Marital status		
	Currently married	0.954	0.402*
	Widowed and divorced/separated	0.960	0.316**
	Never married (ref)	-	-
	Social group		
Scheduled tribe	2.541**	0.924	
Scheduled caste	1.185*	0.777	
Other backward caste	0.782**	0.389**	
Others (ref)	-	-	

\*\*Significance level is less than equal to 0.001.

\*Significance level is less than equal to 0.05.

regular salaried jobs is almost one-third and 60% less than those who were never married.

Lastly, membership in a particular social group determined the work status of the women migrants. For example, the regression result shows that as compared to "other" high caste women, women belonging to the lower castes including tribals were more likely to work as casual labourers (Table 17, p 121).

#### 4 Conclusion

Migration is emerging as a livelihood option and urban locations undoubtedly provide more, if not better work opportunities. However, gendered constructs operate in how women and men are differentially placed in availing these opportunities. Although stereotypical constructions of women's place within the domain of household responsibilities continue to encode migrant women's employment pattern in urban areas, the younger women seem to have moved away from these constructs, assisted further by educational attainment beyond a certain threshold.

That said, childcare and care for the aged do keep women away from either joining or continuing in the formal labour market. The hypothetical intersection between marriage and lowered chances of joining the workforce are borne by the study: unmarried women engaged in regular salaried jobs were almost twice the number of married women whereas marriage was not a constraining factor for men. This can also be due to the higher educational attainments amongst unmarried women: 83% of the unmarried women were literate as against 49% of married women. A further break-up of data

related to unmarried women who were in regular salaried jobs shows that more than 50% of them were educated up to the higher secondary and above level. Moreover, nearly all the unmarried women were full time workers (96%) as compared to married women (88%). Most of these salaried jobs, however, remained at the lower ends of the job spectrum and in traditional fields.

However, educational levels and workforce participation was ambivalently posited when seen in combination with caste status. Even as highly educated women were least likely to withdraw from the labour market as a result of their migration to urban locations, relatively more women from the high castes with similar educational levels were opting out of the workforce. It can thus be conjectured that both "high castes" and the "highly educated" categories were diverse and career paths did not follow a straitjacket caste/education nexus, as we traditionally understand it.

Also, women migrants – younger or older – are not undifferentiated categories and their work pathways vary not only by age and education, as pointed out earlier, but also by the fact of whether or not they had previous work experiences. It mattered perhaps not so much in terms of moving to better work options as much as shifting to available work avenues. That said, the labour market asymmetries in terms of caste/class and paucity of enabling opportunities continue to operate. Even as the nature of work changes in the urban milieu, there is not much in terms of upward mobility particularly for the lower castes and poor migrants, both men and women.

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## NOTES

- 1 This may not be true of women in general. As Das and Desai (2003) point out, it can be status-linked withdrawal from public sphere of formal work or desire to confine themselves to only white-collar jobs. They found lack of appropriate jobs to be the main reason for educated women's absence from the workforce. However, migrants are in a somewhat different league.
- 2 As per the NSS report for 2004-05, a sizeable proportion of urban women (around 27%) were willing to accept work if it is available within the household (NSSO, 2004-05).
- 3 However, as pointed out by Kelkar and Nathan, in some cases, particularly in more competitive areas of the industry such as multinational companies or large Indian firms where poaching is common, employers seem to prefer married women with children, as they are not too mobile and would be willing to stay in "a boring job" for domestic reasons. Women were viewed as "efficient in the work and do not leave the company as soon as they get better opportunities" (2005:13).
- 4 Multinomial logistic regressions are done in cases where the dependent variable is not in a binary form, i.e., the dependent variable is not restricted to two categories. In the present analysis the dependent variable is migrant workforce, categorised into self-employed, regular salaried and casual labour. Self-employment is taken as the reference category and regular salaried work or casual labour is placed as a function of independent variables such as education, marital status, social group, etc.

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