

# Migration as a Livelihood Strategy

## A Gender Perspective

*This paper, based on a sample study of female migrant workers in Tamil Nadu, highlights the trends, pattern and nature of female migration in Tamil Nadu; the push and pull factors of migration and finally the role of migration as a livelihood strategy. The major push factor was lack of employment opportunities in the place of origin caused by drought and the pull factor was a favourable employment situation in the destination areas. After migration there seems to be a sizeable improvement in self-employment and regular salaried jobs for women. But the concentration of women in the informal sector to the extent of 82 per cent is an indication of their disadvantaged position in the urban labour market.*

*Weighing the gains and losses, the study concludes that migration has helped migrant households avoid hunger, starvation and death, though it has failed to improve the economic well-being of about 43 per cent of the families, particularly the female headed households. To alleviate poverty the government's attention should be directed towards combating population movement via rural development and also improving the living conditions of those who had already moved.*

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In physiological terms migration primarily means movement of people from one place or location to another, which is not of a casual nature, as a visit or a tour. Migration is necessarily a pre-emptive move; it is the survival instinct that drives humans to seek better prospects. It is generally believed that the globalisation process all over the world has accelerated the migration trend, particularly women in search of survival, fulfilment and a better life for themselves and their families. Recent studies in India have reported an increasing number of young women joining the migrant flow to cities, many of them going on their own to find work in service, manufacturing and informal sectors. Many scholars have analysed the phenomenon of migration, but it is only since the 1970s that scholars have made attempts to understand migration from a gender perspective on account of the realisation that there are gender related variations in the causes, consequences and patterns of migration.

Morokvasic (1983:13) defines the condition of migrant women as a fourfold oppression at the levels of: (i) Working class, (ii) Gender, (iii) Migrant minority group, and (iv) Accept oppression as their fate

Phizlackea (1996) points to three contemporary economic sectors which indicate a peculiar model of current female migratory processes: the sex and marriage industries, the maid industry and the home working of migrant and ethnic minority women. The Italian examples fits this model, as a large proportion of migrant women are employed as domestic workers. Female migrant labour offers specific advantages to employers – they can be employed in certain low wage sectors of the economy.

Black women's migration to Italy as primary migrants, provides new evidence of a shift in women's migratory patterns, i e, feminisation of migration [Andall 2000:14-15]. Women make up nearly half of the international migrant population. In all countries more men than women appear to be migrating, although the women migrating in India outnumber males. In India, men

dominate migration streams to large cities, but women dominate in short distance moves within rural areas. The latter trend reflects mainly marriage migration, where the Indian custom requires that the bride move to the husband's village. More than 75 per cent of all migrants in India are women [NSS 1999-2000].

As per the 1991 Census data (by birth place criterion) there are 133.58 lakh life time migrants in Tamil Nadu, made up of 87.53 lakh females and 46.05 lakh males. The proportion of migrant population in the state is about 23.92 per cent. Female migrants outnumber male migrants – this is revealed by the fact that while female migrants constitute 31.76 per cent of total female population in the state, the proportion of male migrants in total male population is 16.27 per cent. This trend of female migrants exceeding male migrants is true of both rural and urban areas of the state. Of the total female migrants enumerated in Tamil Nadu in 1991 about 65 per cent of movement is within the same district (intra-district), 27 per cent between districts of the state (inter-district) and 5 per cent from other states (inter-state). Thus the majority of female migrants in Tamil Nadu are short distance movers.

Against this background the subsequent sections will focus on the issues of: Why do women migrate? What are the push and pull factors? Which age and social groups among women are more migratory? What is the pattern and nature of female migration? How are migration decisions arrived at? To what extent were women able to access social networks? Can migration alleviate poverty?

The analysis is based on 470 sample respondents drawn from Coimbatore city/Tirupur town and another 485 respondents drawn from Chennai. The sample migrants are grouped as those working in the formal/informal sectors and those engaged in the construction activities (this group represents seasonal migrants).

*Pattern of female migration:* The pattern of female migration can be studied on the basis of birth place. It helps to know whether

migrants were from rural or urban areas. Nearly 73 per cent of female migrants were from rural areas and the rest from urban areas, indicating that rural to urban migration is greater than urban to urban migration. In those cases where the duration of stay in urban areas was more than 30 years, people are less migratory (Table 1). The pattern of migration suggests that migrants from rural areas do migrate even after their 30 years of stay in their birth place because of lack of favourable employment opportunities for their livelihood. More than 50 per cent of the female respondents covered by this survey were dependent on agriculture for their survival. Agriculture is a seasonal occupation and regions that are not well developed and are drought prone fail to absorb labour and hence people are forced to migrate to urban areas. Further, studies point out that the gender-specific demand for labour, particularly in export industries, has resulted in the out-migration of rural women [Roberts 1997:276].

*Trends in female migration:* A study of the trends in female migration is essential to know the period during which migration was maximum and why it was maximum. Table 3 shows the trend in female migration in the study region over the period. Maximum migration of 51 per cent has occurred during the period 1991-2000. The year 2001 alone accounts for about 11 per cent of the total female migration in the study areas. Nearly 80 per cent of female migration has taken place after 1980. This trend and pattern is because rural economies have failed to generate adequate employment opportunities for the rural poor. Labour absorption capacity in agriculture has declined owing to mechanisation, insufficient irrigation and droughts in several parts of the state.

Main inferences drawn with regard to sending and receiving areas (Table 4).

- Interstate migration is significant, accounting for about 11 per cent of total female migration. The major sending states are the neighbouring states: Kerala (64 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh (30 per cent). There are inflows from Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Pondicherry also. Large-scale interstate inflows are to Coimbatore (63 per cent), which borders Kerala.

- Salem district accounts for large scale inter-district migration in all three areas of investigation (16 per cent). The other sending districts are: Erode (6.96 per cent), Theni and Dindigul (6.35 per cent), Villupuram (5.4 per cent), Tirunelveli (4.4 per cent), Kancheepuram and Dharmapuri (3.7 per cent). There seems to be an inverse relationship between outmigration and relative development of the district. The sending districts are as expected, relatively backward in comparison to the receiving areas, viz, Chennai, Coimbatore and Tirupur.

- The movement from nearby districts outnumbers their migration from far off districts.

- However, women do participate in long distance migration as well (400 kms and above) - Tirunelveli to Chennai; Nagercoil to Coimbatore, Ramanthapuram to Chennai, etc.

In this sample study there was large-scale family migration. While two-thirds of women accounted for such migration only one-fourth of respondents moved individually. Individual migration of unmarried girls is relatively more in recent times, i e, since 1991 and is found largely among the unskilled, less educated/illiterate, and rural oriented and are exclusively dependent on informal sector employment for survival. Step migration was observed among 18 per cent of the respondents. Maximum migration of seven times was found among three respondents in Coimbatore. Nearly 32 per cent of the female

migrants have migrated four times before reaching the destination areas.

### Causes or Reasons for Migration

The causes of migration are generally traced to economic, socio-cultural and environmental determinants. Economic explanations centre on the search for better opportunities of income and employment, socio cultural explanations centre on the desire of migrants to break away from traditional constraints and inequalities. Environmental explanations centre on the lure of the cities and migration induced by disaster, displacement and demographic pressures or imbalances.

Tables 5 and 6 show the push and pull factors of female migration in the study areas. The primary push factor was lack of employment opportunities in the place of origin, given rank 1 by about 57 per cent and rank 2 by about 49 per cent of the respondents.

Unemployment was cited as the main reason for migration by nearly 71 per cent of interstate female migrants. The main pull factors were favourable employment situation (assigned rank 1 by about 45 per cent of the respondents) and jobs already arranged in the place of destination through social networks (given rank 1 by nearly one-fifth of the respondents). Education was assigned the least rank by more than 60 per cent of the respondents. They felt that education was not a prerequisite to continue their unskilled work in which they were engaged before and after migration.

### Drought and Migration

There is a close nexus between drought and migration. Greater the intensity of drought, larger the migration of agricultural households to urban areas in search of employment in the non-agricultural activities. The worst drought years in the history of Tamil Nadu after independence are:

- 1965-66
- 1974-75
- 1982-83, 1987 and 1989
- 1998, 1999
- 2001 and 2002

Drought prone regions/districts of Tamil Nadu:

- Salem
- Dindigul
- Dharmapuri
- Ramanathapuram

**Table 1: Female Migrants by Place of Birth**

Area/Years of Stay	No of Migrants	Per Cent to Grand Total
<b>Rural</b>		
< 10	10	1.05
11 - 20	215	22.51
21 - 30	350	36.64
31 - 40	107	11.20
> 41	15	1.57
Total	697	72.97
<b>Urban</b>		
< 10	6	0.63
11 - 20	114	11.94
21 - 30	106	11.10
31 - 40	29	3.04
> 41	3	0.32
Total	258	27.03
Grand Total	955	100.00

Source: Survey Data.

The current drought is the consequence of the failure of the north-east monsoon over Tamil Nadu both in 2001 and in 2002. The Tamil Nadu government has declared all districts in the state barring Chennai as drought-hit areas (*The Hindu*, January 23, 2003). The state is experiencing the worst drought in 37 years. Drought has increased the level of rural unemployment in the state, which is estimated as 22 per cent, higher than the rural unemployment rate of 4 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, which is declared by the centre as drought-affected state. Gross area irrigated by all sources during 1999-2000 was 3,585,207 hectares as against 3,634,751 hectares during 1998-99, registering a decrease of 1.4 per cent due to insufficient rainfall during the period.

None of the rivers have water. There is no ground water recharging. Water level in some of the districts is below 800 to 900 feet. Karnataka refusing to release adequate quantities of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu, has aggravated the situation (*The Hindu*, January 23, 2003).

According to this empirical survey, unemployment caused by drought, has led to large-scale migration of agricultural labour from Madurai, Salem, Dindigul, Theni, Tirunelveli, Villupuram and Ramanathapuram districts to the industrial towns of Tirupur and Coimbatore and even to metropolitan city, viz, Chennai. Salem is generally susceptible to drought and therefore a famine prone area. Water is a scarce resource especially in the southern taluks of Salem district. Nearly 70 per cent of its population is dependent on agriculture either directly or indirectly. Continual failure of monsoon led to famine and unemployment in the district, for the tank and well irrigation systems are inadequate to protect the crops indefinitely. The second most important economic activity in the district is handloom weaving which is concentrated in the southern taluks of the district. The introduction of power looms in the 1960s had displaced 1000s of women

weavers who had no other option than to depend on agriculture for survival. This has also contributed to the over crowding of women in agriculture, resulting in large-scale unemployment of women. Dharmapuri district, which is adjacent to Salem, is also a backward region with low level of manufacturing and very high level of informal sector. It has been declared by the government of Tamil Nadu as one of the drought prone districts of the state in the 1990s.

Dindigul district has been facing the problem of drought since 1980s. The drought situation has become severe which has affected not only the crop cultivation, but also cattle population depriving them of fodder. Respondents of this study who where from the Dindigul sold their cattle to the slaughter just for Rs 2,000 which would in normal time fetch Rs 8,000.

Theni district is also experiencing drought since mid-1990s. A few people of this district had left for Kerala to work in brick kilns; digging trenches in Kerala to lay telephone cables, etc. Many have migrated to work in hosiery units and some have taken up construction work in Tirupur town.

Next to Dharmapuri, Ramanathapuram is considered as one of the most economically backward districts of the state. It has been one of the worst hit districts of the state, thereby contributing largely to the migration of population to other districts of the state.

Thus a review of the background of the places of origin of migrant respondents reveal, that in more than 50 per cent of the cases, lack of employment caused by failure of monsoon has resulted in the exodus of the labour from rural to urban areas. Recent drought in the state has adversely affected the farming community. Eleven farmers have lost their lives. They died of starvation or committed suicide; some died of shock on seeing their withering crop. There are stories and pictures of farmers

**Table 2: Pattern of Female Migration in Tamil Nadu: Chennai City, Coimbatore City and Tirupur Town**  
Distribution of Female Migrants on the basis of Place of Origin

Decades	Coimbatore City							Total
	Salem	Erode	Dindigul	Theni	Ramanathapuram	Other districts	Other States	
1951-60	-	2	2	-	-	2	5	11
1961-70	2	1	3	-	-	-	3	9
1971-80	6	2	2	-	3	14	7	34
1981-90	11	2	2	-	4	4	18	41
1991-2000	26	24	21	27	16	16	23	153
2001	8	2	4	2	2	18	11	47
Total	53	33	34	29	25	54	67	295

Decades	Tirupur Town						Total
	Salem	Erode	Theni	Dindigul	Madurai	Other districts	
1951-60	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1961-70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1971-80	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
1981-90	5	2	3	2	2	6	29
1991-2000	23	21	19	16	21	11	124
2001	4	3	2	1	5	2	19
Total	35	26	24	19	28	19	175

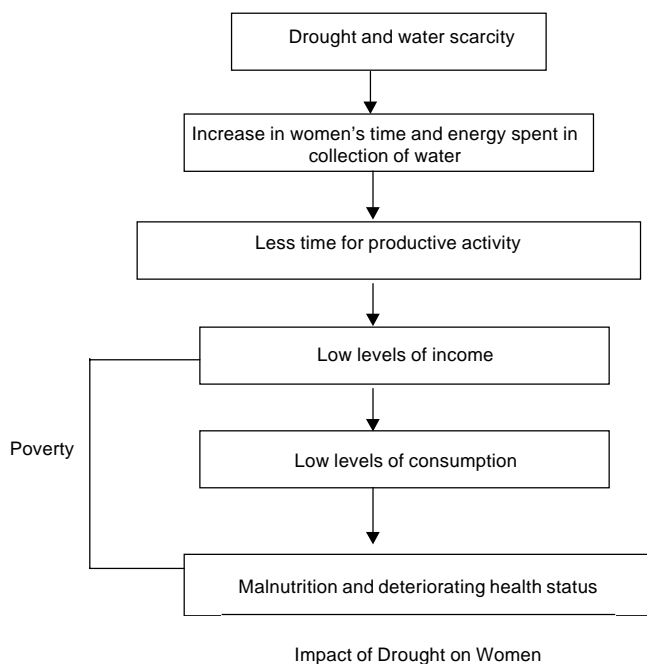
Decades	Chennai City							Total
	Salem	Kancheepuram	Villupuram	Dharmapuri	Vellore	Tirunelveli	Other Districts in Tamil Nadu	
1951-60	1	1	2	3	-	-	3	10
1961-70	4	2	3	6	5	2	27	49
1971-80	15	8	13	6	-	-	41	83
1981-90	11	12	9	2	-	-	60	94
1991-2000	18	5	17	5	23	31	103	213
2001	-	3	2	8	-	4	14	36
Total	49	31	46	30	28	37	248	485

Source: Survey Data.

eating, rats, crabs and snails [Subramanian 2003]. Climate perturbations seem to be major factor contributing towards female migration. In this context it is necessary to note that the respondents of this study have been rational in their decision to migrate from rural areas to towns/cities. In fact migration has been an important survival strategy among the poorer rural households. Thus women like men tend to move out of areas where economic opportunities are limited to areas where employment is available. The economic motive is seen as the principal force in female as well as male migration.

There is a direct association between migration, poverty, unemployment and drought particularly among rural households. Drought → Unemployment → Poverty → Migration (in search of livelihood)

The adverse effect of drought on women from eco-feminists perspective is summarised in the following chart [Sundari 1999:151].



### Social Capital and Migrant Women

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. It enhances the investment in physical and human capital. Relatives or people from the village who have already moved to the city often constitute social networks.

Men and women's social networks differ and correspondingly men and women have different levels of access to information. The poor migrant women cope with the urban environment by using their social networks, consisting of kith and kin and friends as well. Social networks helped the migrant women/family in:

- Job and house search
- Food and shelter during the waiting period for a job/ house.

Women are more dependent on social networks in the destination area than men are [Lisa Eklund 2000:52]. If the female migrant has relatives or acquaintances in the city it might function as a motivation and pull factor for her to move, since that would bring more security to her vulnerable social position [UN 1993:27].

Information networks between the city and village are especially important in shaping rural urban migration streams. Information regarding the labour market passes through these networks and functions to encourage or discourage potential migrants accordingly. Further the information about the job prospects in the urban labour market migrants is spread by the migrants during their visit to the native places. Social networks perform an important adaptive function for the migrant once she/he reaches the city. This study shows that the vast majority of the slum dwellers migrate to particular cities because they have kinship relations, persons of the same caste or village friends already in the city who can help them in housing, employment and adjust to the urban situation once they arrive in the city.

According to this survey, about 73 per cent of the female respondents received information about the demand for labour through their personal/social contacts. It was for about 40 per cent of the respondents, their relatives and friends prior to their movement to the town/city had arranged employment. However one-fourth of the respondents did not have such contacts and they had to suffer miserably in the initial period. Thus a high proportion of jobs by migrant women were found via friends, relatives and acquaintances.

Poor migrants who live in squatter settlements, retain a strong sense of community. They reside mostly within enclaves populated by people from their home village, or live with relatives who have developed strong ties within a more diverse community. Slum communities have well-defined leaders who mediate with the government and obtain certain essential services such as drinking water, streetlights, drainage facilities, etc. Eviction and demolition of huts in encroached areas are delayed on account of these leaders who are affiliated mostly to regional parties.

### Migration Decisions

In the context of studying the trends, pattern and nature of female migration, it would be interesting to seek answers to the following questions:

- (i) In the case of family migration, who took the migration decisions?
- (ii) If migration decisions were jointly taken by men and women (husband and wife), was the migration decision based on the net expected income of both men and women or that of men only or that of women only?

The empirical results suggest that out of 605 women migrants who were married at the time of migration, 401 moved as part

**Table 3: Migration Push Factors – Ranking by Female Migrant Respondents**

Push Factors	Ranks	
	I	II
1 Marriage	120 (12.57)	99 (10.37)
2 Education	31 (3.25)	30 (3.14)
3 Social tension	52 (5.55)	75 (7.85)
4 Lack of employment	541 (56.65)	463 (48.48)
5 Loss of land	72 (7.34)	154 (16.13)
6 Family problems	95 (9.95)	89 (9.32)
7 Mechanization of agriculture	7 (0.73)	2 (0.21)
8 Transfer	11 (1.15)	-
9 Others	26 (2.72)	43 (4.50)
Total	955 (100.00)	955 (100.00)

Source: Survey Data.

of the family. Among the latter group, migration decisions were jointly taken by both men and women in nearly 60 per cent of the families. The decision to migrate was taken independently by men in about 32 per cent of the households and only in 9 per cent of the families, the decision was taken solely by women. In about 40 per cent of families where joint decisions were made, the physical movement was first made by men and other members of the family moved later. In about 10 per cent of the households, women migrated first and other members of the family joined her in the later period. In around 50 per cent of the families, all members of the household – men, women, children, aged etc moved together. In such cases, employment was already arranged either for men or women in the place of destination.

In respect of 330 women, who were unmarried at the time of migration, 36 per cent moved as part of family, one-fourth of the families had sent their daughters to cities/towns in order to enhance the household income through their earnings. In about 40 per cent of the households the decision to migrate was solely taken by women. However in the case of 20 migrant women, whose marital status at the time of migration was widow/divorcee/separated, the migration decisions were taken by them independently, except in two cases – where the migration decision was taken by the relatives. In about 55 per cent of the households, the migration decision was on the expected income of both the husband and wife. The major reason for this trend is that in the place of origin, most migrant women were in paid employment and they expected to continue their participation in the labour force even after migration. It is worth noting that there are cases where children's expected income through their labour was also considered in migration decisions. In the case of individual migration, migration decisions were based exclusively on the anticipated employment and income of women in urban areas. Migrants with long established network of contacts and information were more aware of potential opportunities and difficulties. Hence their expectations were not too high. However migrants with inaccurate and incorrect information gathered through their social networks form high expectations. Between these two extremes there is another group of migrants who move with little knowledge of what to expect. Only on arrival to the city, the rural family discovers that the housing, jobs and amenities that had pulled them to the city are not available and also accessible. Thus survival becomes difficult in a city with inadequate income and a high urban cost of living.

Before migration, 90 per cent were in paid employment. Among those employed nearly one-fourth of them had no idea at the time of migration as to what their earnings would be in the place of destination. Majority of the respondents stated that their current earnings are much below their expected income. Only one-third pointed out that their present earnings are equal to or higher than their expectations.

### Demographic Profile

Table 5 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of migrant women. Majority of the female migrants (39 per cent) belong to the age group 21-30. As from the present age of the female migrants, nothing important can be inferred, it is necessary to analyse the age of the migrants at the time of migration as that would reveal the age group among whom the tendency to migrate is large. The largest proportion of respondents

(49 per cent) migrated when they were in the age group 21-30. About 36 per cent of the female migrants moved when they were between 31 and 40 years. In these two age groups, maximum migratory tendency was observed. It should be mentioned here that most of the women who migrate at less than 20 years of age, migrated as daughters of the primary migrants.

Hindus dominate the migration stream in Tamil Nadu (82 per cent). Castewise study of female migrants shows that most of them (36 per cent) are from backward castes such as nadar, thevar, gounder, etc, and 30 per cent are from most backward communities (MBC) namely kalliar, vanniya and padaiyachi. The movement of the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled

**Table 4: Migration Pull Factors – Ranking by Female Migrant Respondents**

Pull Factors	Ranks	
	I	II
1 Employment arranged	180 (18.85)	229(23.98)
2 Favourable employment situation	424(44.40)	240(25.13)
3 Family contacts	141(14.76)	132(13.82)
4 Other social contacts	34(3.56)	127(13.30)
5 Educational benefits	46(4.82)	34(3.56)
6 Institutional benefits	39(4.09)	66(6.91)
7 Familiarity with the city	22(2.3)	36(3.77)
8 Social status assured	60(6.28)	81(8.48)
9 Others	9(0.94)	10(1.05)
Total	955(100.00)	955(100.00)

Source: Survey Data.

**Table 5: Demographic Profile of Migrant Women**

Characteristics	No of Women Respondents
Age (Present)	
<20	57 (5.97)
21-30	371(38.85)
31-40	270(28.27)
41-50	181(18.95)
51-60	59(6.18)
60+	17(1.78)
Total	955 (100.00)
Religion	
Hindu	780 (81.68)
Christian	97 (10.68)
Muslim	78 (8.17)
Total	955 (100.00)
Caste	
Forward	33 (3.46)
Backward	345 (36.13)
Most Backward	287 (30.05)
Scheduled Caste	270 (28.27)
Scheduled Tribe	20 (2.09)
Total	955 (100.00)
Marital status(present)	
Single	124 (12.98)
Married	727 (76.13)
Divorced	1 (0.11)
Widow	89 (1.46)
Separate	14 (1.46)
Total	955 (100.00)
Educational status	
Never been to school	380 (39.79)
Primary	214(22.41)
Secondary	156 (16.34)
X	55 (5.75)
+2	29 (3.04)
UG	78 (8.17)
PG and above	43 (4.50)
Total	955 (100.00)

Note: Figures in brackets are proportions to the total.

Source: Survey Data.

Tribe (ST) women is about one-third of the total sample size. There is concentration of married women in the migration stream, both before and after migration. About 64 per cent of the migrants were married and living with their husband after migration. The number of widows has increased from 2 per cent before migration to 9 per cent after migration. Nearly 58 per cent of migrant households belong to the moderate family size group of 4 to 6 members. Number of households headed by women has increased from 6 per cent before migration to 14 per cent after migration.

The educational status of migrant households is depressing with 40 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men never having been to school. This adequately explains the overcrowding of migrant population in unskilled, badly paid, insecure jobs in the urban labour market, often working under appalling conditions. There is virtually no investment on human capital in the case of poorer households.

### Occupational Pattern of Female Migrants

Are migrant women a more vulnerable section of the labour force? The answer to this question depends upon the type of work performed by different categories of labour within the labour markets. Table 6 represents the occupational pattern of female migrants, before and after migration. Among the 857 employed women before migration, the incidence of casual labour seemed to be high, accounting for about 65 per cent of total female employment. While 20 per cent of women were self-employed, the corresponding proportion for regular/salaried category was 15 per cent. But after migration, there is a sizeable improvement in both regular/salaried jobs and self-employment. In fact self-employment has increased by nearly 9 percentage points. Casual wage employment has significantly fallen, giving rise to other categories of employment. Poorer women who are mostly illiterate and unskilled were easily absorbed as cultivators/labourers in agriculture in their place of origin. Lack of skill is a major handicap for these women in urban areas who cannot seek casual wage employment and hence are forced to go in for self-employment. However an indepth analysis of the nature of works held by women in the self-employment category and their daily earnings in urban areas presents a dismal picture.

The occupational pattern of the respondent's father or husband is shown in Table 7. Before migration, the trend is that while 57 per cent were casual labourers, 35 per cent were self-employed and the rest (9 per cent) were in regular/salaried jobs. After migration, self-employment for male migrants has drastically declined by about 11 percentage points, giving rise to casual wage employment which has increased sizeably by 6 percentage points.

These trends are partly consistent with the macro level data for the entire population in Tamil Nadu. In urban Tamil Nadu, more women (39 per cent) than men are in self-employed category (33 per cent); however a different situation is seen with regard to regular employed and casual labour categories where men outnumber women. The urban areas are generating more of self-employment opportunities for women than men.

Like migrant women, the men of their families are largely seen to be employed in the informal sector both before and after migration. Before migration nearly one-fourth of men were engaged in agriculture as cultivators and on moving to urban areas they

are largely employed as casual labourers in the activities of drainage works, loading and unloading, watchmen, porters, hotels, construction works, road building, etc.

### Earnings of Female Migrant Workers

The earnings level of women is important not only in its contribution to the total household income but also in determining her status and role in the household economy. Table 8 shows the compound growth rate in the average earnings of female migrants after migration .

The annual mean income of female migrants employed in the informal sector are:

- (1) Coimbatore slum: Rs 14,600, (2) Tirupur slum: Rs 10,920, (3) Construction workers: Rs 15,230, (4) Chennai slum: Rs 14,130.

In the case of those employed in the formal sector, the yearly earnings vary between Rs 40,000 and Rs 2,00,000. The compound growth rate of the annual earnings of migrant women over a period suggest that the growth in income is relatively larger for the earlier migrants (i e, before 1991) than recent migrants (i e, after 1991) with the exception of construction workers.

### Earning Differentials

Earning differentials among sample respondents can be explained in terms of their educational status, productivity, experience and nature of employment they are engaged with. It also depends on the number of days an individual is employed a year. The mean annual earnings of women migrants in the formal sector is Rs 76,425 and in the informal sector the earnings are Rs 13,720.

Even in the informal sector there is significant variation in the earnings of women. The highest annual earnings of Rs 15,230 are earned by women engaged in construction work, despite irregular nature of their employment. Perhaps, this may be due to a relatively higher wage rate for construction work compared to other casual works (Table 9).

Lowest earnings are accounted for by women migrants of Tirupur slum, who are largely employed in textile units that are

**Table 6: Occupational Pattern of Female Migrants**

Type of Employment	Before Migration		After Migration	
	No	Per Cent	No	Per Cent
Regular/salaried	131	15.29	176	18.43
Casual labour	557	64.99	505	52.88
Self-employed	169	19.72	274	28.69
Total	857	100.00	955	100.00
Unemployed	98	-	-	-
Grand total	955	100.00	955	100.00

Source: Survey Data.

**Table 7: Occupational Pattern of Male Migrants**

Type of Employment	Before Migration		After Migration	
	No	Per Cent	No	Per Cent
Regular/salaried	78	8.74	111	12.83
Casual labour	506	56.73	546	63.12
Self-employed	308	34.53	208	24.05
Total	892	100.00	865	100.00
Unemployed	-	-	-	-
Grand total	892	100.00	865	100.00

Source: Survey Data.

mostly export-oriented. There was a steep decline in exports from this region. Fall in exports has increased unemployment particularly in the Tirupur area. A sharp reduction in the number of days of employment has reduced the annual earnings of women employed in the export units. Further, Tirupur town is surrounded by a number of villages; villagers unable to seek employment in agriculture and allied activities and also to carry on cultivation economically, move as migrants to Tirupur town, which accentuates the existing unemployment in this region. Though self-employed women are relatively better off with employment for about 300 days a year, their per day income is very low, ranging between Rs 25 and Rs 45. In short, the earnings for all female migrants, irrespective of place and period of movement has increased after migration.

Like the female migrants, the earnings of all male migrants have increased sizeably after migration. The earnings of migrant men are significantly larger than those of migrant women both in the formal and informal sectors as well as before and after migration. Among the male workers in the informal sector, the average annual earnings are highest in Chennai slum (Rs 21,600) followed by Coimbatore slum (Rs 20,420). The annual earning of male workers is lowest in Tirupur slum (Rs 18,240). Male-female income differential is relatively higher in Chennai (Rs 7,470) and Tirupur (Rs 7,320) slums than Coimbatore slum (Rs 5,820) and also among the construction workers (Rs 4,370). Correlating gender disparity in income with poverty, it is noted that greater the disparity in male/female income, the larger the incidence of poverty. This inference is not applicable to workers employed in the formal sector, who are all above poverty line because of higher earnings.

### Problems Faced by Female Migrants at Worksites

The majority of female migrants experience a cut in wages for taking leave; and a few were terminated from service for absenteeism. Some are paid lower wages than the local workers. Job insecurity is one of the vital problems faced by about 70 per cent of the respondents. Informal sector and casual workers were not eligible for paid holidays and medical benefits.

Another major problem is increasing competition for jobs. This can in part be due to migration pressure which is the result of an excess supply of people willing to migrate relative to the demand for people in potential destinations. The problem of seeking regular employment was found to be severe in case of respondents having poor social capital. Employers are also reluctant to absorb migrant workers, unless they are referred to them by some known people. Further, the casualisation of work along with globalisation has reduced the possibilities of getting regular jobs among migrants.

There were cases of sexual harassment at work place (15 per cent), which was tackled by shifting the work place. This problem was found largely among domestic, construction and other workers of casual nature. No formal association of any kind was found amongst the migrant households.

Though these problems are encountered by all women in the urban informal labour market, the intensity is greater among migrant women who are largely illiterate and lack knowledge of the current wage rate. Further the exigency to seek employment on arrival pushes down the reservation wages of migrant women on one hand and raises the bargaining power of the employer on the other, which results in the

acceptance of wages and working conditions at a level below the local workers.

### Poverty and Urban Migrant Households

Poverty is a multidimensional concept, which is complex in origin as well as in its manifestation [World Bank 1997:3]. While the poor suffer in general, women among them are the worst victims. Women's poverty differs from that of men both in degree and in kind. Poverty has thus assumed for itself strong gender connotations. "Poverty has a woman's face" and that 70 per cent of the world's poor are female...but in almost all cases women and girls suffer from them to a greater degree than men (Human Development Report 1995).

Migration can both cause and be caused by poverty. Similarly, poverty can be alleviated as well exacerbated by population movement. The relative impact of migration on poverty varies by the level of development of the area under consideration [Skeldon 2002:67].

The household income of all women migrants employed in the formal sector both at Chennai and Coimbatore are well above the poverty line in terms of income<sup>1</sup> and expenditure<sup>2</sup> criteria. Table 10 represents the household income of the female migrants employed in the informal sector. The average household income estimated for each group suggests that all the households with the exception of Tirupur slum are above the poverty line. However, disaggregation of income data suggests that the incidence of poverty is larger in Tirupur slum (51 per cent) than Coimbatore (40 per cent) and Chennai slums (44 per cent). The degree of poverty is lower among the construction workers (22 per cent) (Table 11). Linking women's earnings and poverty, it is observed that the incidence is larger where the women's earnings are lower.

On the basis of the expenditure norm it is found that about one-third of the households in Coimbatore slum, one-tenth of the households engaged in construction work, 35 per cent of the households in Chennai slum and 40 per cent of the households in Tirupur slum are below the poverty line. Even in terms of

**Table 8: Compound Growth Rate (Per Cent) in Annual Earnings of Female Migrants**

Period of Migration	Coimbatore City		Tirupur		Chennai City	
	Informal Sector	Formal Sector	Informal Sector	Construction Workers	Informal Sector	Formal Sector
1951-60	10.36	-	-	-	9.43	-
1961-70	11.95	11.84	-	-	7.22	-
1971-80	12.04	9.92	11.25	-	8.86	-
1981-90	13.14	11.34	10.78	4.22	10.19	-
1991-2000	9.53	5.87	9.34	7.09	12.87	17.09

Source: Survey Data

**Table 9: Current Daily Wages of Female Migrants – A Comparative Statement.**

Sl Occupation No Category	No of Days of Employment (Per Year)	Daily Earnings/Wage Rate (in Rs)	
		Coimbatore	Chennai
1 Agricultural labour	180-200	30.45	-
2 Construction work	250-270	70	80
3 Export unit (Tirupur)	200-230	45-60	-
4 Other casual workers	240-270	-	50
5 Self employed	300	25-35	25-50

Source: Survey Data.

expenditure criteria, the incidence of poverty is still higher in Tirupur slum. Overall, while about 43 per cent of the migrant households are below poverty line on the basis of income, 34 per cent of the migrant families are below poverty line on the basis of the expenditure criterion. Incidence of income poverty is greater than the expenditure poverty.

A comparison of per capita income and per capita consumption expenditure indicates that for migrant households dependent on informal sector for livelihood, the average per capita expenditure is greater than the per capita income for all areas under investigation. However the income-expenditure disparity is lower among the construction workers (Rs 96) followed by households of Coimbatore slums (Rs 103). The difference is highest for households of Tirupur slums (Rs 153) and for Chennai it is Rs 123. Larger the difference between per capita income and per capita consumption expenditure, greater the degree of poverty

### Asset Position of Migrant Households

Out of 955 migrant households interviewed by this survey, 117 were in possession of agricultural land (12 per cent) before migration. Except four households, who have retained their land in their place of origin, all the other migrant households have become landless after migration. Households with land over five acres were also migratory on account of failure of agriculture to support life systems.

The households sold their land for rates less than its market value on account of the urge to move to cities and also there was no local buyer to purchase land at its market value. After migration, there is a deterioration in the asset holdings of the migrant households, and this is true particularly of the lower income strata. About 47 per cent of migrant households have become assetless. Though there is a decline in the possession of assets such as land, house, jewels and livestock, after migration, among the poorer households, there seems to be an increase in consumer durables like radio, television, bicycle, mixie, two-wheelers, etc.

– The prime cause for poor asset holdings among migrant household is that they had disposed off whatever little asset they had in their place of origin and the receipts were used to meet expenditure on food, clothing, transport, which got exhausted for many households before they could seek employment in the place of destination. Secondly, during a financial crisis the households liquidate even the few assets possessed by them as one of the coping strategies.

– The asset holdings of migrant households of the upper income group have increased remarkably.

### Savings and Debt

After migration, there is very little improvement in the savings of the poorer migrant households. The gap between income and expenditure is generally bridged through borrowing. Excluding the migrant households employed in the formal sector, it is observed that before migration only 395 households out of 820 (i.e., 48 per cent) had debt, but after migration 69 per cent of the households are in debt. It is true that the household income has increased for all migrant households, but simultaneously the household debt has also increased, implying that the increase in income after migration is not adequate to support families, given the high cost of living in cities and towns. After migration, the number of households borrowing for consumption and income generating activities, particularly by the self-employed group has increased significantly.

### Balance Sheet of Gains and Losses of Migration

#### Gains:

– Migration has to a greater extent solved the problem of unemployment among women, as all migrant women have been able to seek a job.

– Migration has brought about a dramatic change in the employment pattern of women in the sense that there is a shift from agriculture to non-agricultural activities, particularly self-employment.

– Migration has increased the yearly earnings of all migrants.

– Migration has enhanced the economic status of all households, where women are employed in the formal sector in terms of all parameters such as income, assets, savings, etc.

– Among the lower income groups, migration has raised the economic status of about 57 per cent of migrant families in terms of household income.

– There is improvement in asset holdings of about 53 per cent of migrant families, belonging to low income strata.

– Savings position has improved only in the case of 18 per cent of migrant households among the lower income groups.

**Table 11: Percentage of Sample Migrant Households Below Poverty Line**

Sl No	Area	Income Criteria	Expenditure Criteria
1	Coimbatore slums	40	33
2	Tirupur slums	51	40
3	Construction workers	22	10
4	Chennai slums	44	35
	Aggregate	43	34

Source: Survey Data.

**Table 10: Average Annual Household Income of Female Migrants Employed in the Informal Sector**

Annual Income (in Rs)	Coimbatore Slum		Tirupur Slum		Construction Workers		Chennai Slum	
	No of Households	Per Cent	No of Households	Per Cent	No of Households	Per Cent	No of Households	Per Cent
<15000	4	2.21	11	7.14	3	6.00	15	3.45
15001-20000	29	16.02	53	34.42	2	4	52	11.95
20001-25000	61	33.7	32	20.78	7	14.00	151	34.71
25001-30000	43	23.76	29	18.83	18	36.00	92	21.15
30001-35000	19	10.5	13	8.44	11	22.00	78	17.93
35001-40000	15	8.29	7	4.55	5	10	30	6.90
40001-45000	8	4.42	9	5.84	4	8	17	3.91
45001-50000	2	1.10	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	181	100.00	154	100.00	50	100.00	435	100.0
Average	25870		21810		38500		25450	

Source: Primary Survey.



- Availability of interest free loans from employers.
- Access to better health care, transport, recreation, etc.

#### Losses:

- About 43 per cent of the households are below poverty line on the basis of income and 34 per cent of the migrant families are under poverty line on the basis of expenditure criteria. The incidence of poverty is found to be larger among FHHs.
- The overcrowding of women in the informal sector to the extent of 82 per cent is an indication of migrant women's disadvantaged position in the urban labour market
- About 47 per cent of the migrant households belonging to the lower income group have become assetless.
- The burden of debt has increased among 80 per cent of the low income migrant households particularly for those who migrated to the cities after 1990s.
- The interest rates are relatively higher in the urban (10-15 per cent per annum) than rural areas (5-10 per cent per annum).
- There is steady deterioration in the quality of life of migrant households. They are deprived of basic amenities like housing, water supply, drainage etc. Prior to migration all households had at least a roof over their head. Now 40 per cent of the migrants live on pavements/roadsides/under bridges, etc. A large proportion (79 per cent) do not have latrine facilities of any kind. Slum dwellers are the worst victims of urban environmental degradation. Thus the living and working conditions for the rural migrant in the urban areas are deplorable.
- On account of a lack of a permanent address the respondents in slums do not have ration cards, which deprives them of their access to fair price shops for purchase of essentials.
- In the place of origin there was free access to fodder, firewood, etc, and now the migrant households have to purchase them at market prices.
- Rural to urban migration has contributed to the growth of child labour. Though after migration, we find nearly 58 per cent of the children in the age group 6-14, in the labour force, before migration the proportion of children employed was less (30 per cent) either because they were too young to take paid employment or were at school or employment opportunities for children were less in their place of rural origin.
- Psychic cost of loss of local networks and familiar surroundings.

Weighing the gains and losses, it may be inferred that migration has helped the migrant households avoid hunger, starvation and death. Migration is a vital livelihood strategy particularly for poorer households though it has failed to elevate the economic status of all migrating households. To quote Skeldon (1997:7) "migration does not necessarily make migrant better off, indeed some become further impoverished by moving from one place to another".

### Conclusion

Skeldon argues that movement of population can be a significant factor for the alleviation of poverty (2002:75). This may partly hold good in the case of international migration, but in the Indian context this cannot be an appropriate solution. Secondly it depends on how one perceives poverty. If it is defined in a narrow economic sense of low levels of income then migration may help in poverty eradication. In a broader perspective of human development which embraces better quality of life with access to basic necessities, migration cannot be considered as promoting human development. Migration is perceived by

governments, policy-makers and urban planners in India as undesirable. In cities, the population living in squatter and slum settlement is showing an upward trend and the mushrooming growth of slum population exerts increased pressure on provision of minimum basic services such as housing, water supply, health, education and other basic infrastructure including sanitation. Supply of these services is one of the biggest challenges to all urban planners and policy-makers. Further, as migration is seen as contributing to urban environmental degradation, the policy framework must aim at (i) Reducing migration by adopting a 'remain at village' approach. The strategy is to promote rural development and guarantee employment to rural population through various schemes. (ii) Improving the living conditions of the urban slums crowded by the already arrived migrant population.

The recent trend is that it is not the men/women moving to cities, but the family as a whole that is migrating which needs special policy prescriptions. The issue of migration should be given top priority in the local and national government's development agenda. **□**

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### Notes

- 1 The Tamil Nadu government has recently fixed an annual income of Rs 24,000 as the norm to identify the population below the poverty line, for the purpose of targeting the PDS. Accordingly, families with an annual income of Rs 24,000 would be considered to be living below poverty line.
- 2 Based on the National Sample Survey Consumption Expenditure data (55th Round, 1999-2000), the Planning Commission has defined the poverty line in terms of monthly consumption expenditure of Rs 308 per capita for rural and Rs 476 per capita for urban areas in Tamil Nadu.

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