

Mobilities and Spaces: Gendered Dimension of Migration in Urban India

ARPITA BANERJEE

Migration is about people moving from one politically well-defined area to another. In this process, one generally leaves behind a familiar world to explore the unexplored and unseen. Several factors like culture, ethnic boundary and structural restriction may, however, constrain people's mobility. At the same time, mobility may also bring enhanced opportunities for improved living in the new world through extra-local work more feasibly available to migrants, especially for the marginalised. They can also transfer their experiences of new ways of being into local contexts as consumers and for labour deployment (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003).

Earlier, migration was mainly explained in dual terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors, that is, push from the areas of origin and pull of the destination or in terms of structural interdependencies of central and peripheral areas. However, these approaches fail to take into account individuals' or households' decisions to migrate as well as the influence of several socio-demographic factors affecting their mobility. Moreover, the push-pull theories essentially frame migration in terms of work opportunities. As conventional bread earners, men's profiles often get much greater attention in migration studies at the expense of women who are summarily clubbed as associational/dependent — moving on account of marriage — treating their working status, if there is one, as of secondary importance (Agrawal 2006; Seth 2001).

Recent literature (Ghosh 2002; Shanti 1991; Yang and Guo 1999; Zhang 1999), however, suggests women's increased participation in the urban labour market due to the opening up of new avenues of employment that have generated a gender-specific pattern of labour demand. For example, a rising tendency towards nuclear families in

cities, increased participation of educated women in the formal labour market and changing patterns of consumption have generated a demand for services such as domestic help, childcare and full-time-based caretakers (Majumdar 1980; Raghuram 2001). Apart from labour-migration, some women also migrate to resist structural impositions that curtail their mobility or to break away from existing caste taboos (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Karan 2003); in certain cases their movement is motivated by the desire to adopt a 'modern lifestyle' (Brody 2006: 139) and/or to fulfil family obligations. Migration can thus be perceived as a process through which women can fulfil their needs and aspirations. It is this dimension which takes feminist migration studies beyond the mere economics of migration to pivot around social and spatial dimensions of mobility in order to explore the gender/class/caste and religion overlap, their intersecting relationships and how they are navigated through spatial mobility (Neetha 2004; Silvey 2006).

Overall, urban environs can be liberating, yet cities, by virtue of their specific characteristics and varying opportunities, may play out differentially in terms of labour market dynamics. In 2001, every 28 in 100 persons in India resided in urban areas as compared to every 20 persons in 1971. In spite of an absolute increase in the urban population, the growth rate shows a declining trend over the years — from about 3.8 per cent in the 1970s to 2.9 per cent in 1991–2001, respectively (Kundu 2006; Mitra 1994; Sivaramakrishnan et al. 2005).

Class I cities (with a population over 100,000) have been growing faster than other smaller urban settlements in India accounting for nearly 69 per cent of the total urban population. Intermediate cities (population between 20,000 and 99,999) remained fairly constant over the years.¹ The phenomenal growth in class I cities has been attributed to a combination of factors including reclassification of lower-order towns into the class I category, rural-urban migration,

¹ According to the Census of India, 2001, towns and cities are classified on the basis of their population. The categories are: class VI—less than 5,000; class V—5,000–9,999; class IV—10,000–19,999; class III—20,000–49,999; class II—50,000–99,999 and class I—100,000 and above.

satellite growth in the vicinity of large cities and expansion municipal boundaries (Kundu 2006; Sivaramakrishnan et al. 2005).

Although urban migration has increased over the decades — from 26 per cent in 1971 to 33 per cent in 2001 — rural–urban migration accounts for one-fourth of urban growth (Kosambi 2000; Kundu and Gupta 2000; Mitra and Murayama 2008). Recently, women’s mobility towards urban areas has gained prominence. Figures from Census 2001, suggest that the average annual growth rate of the urban migrant — male, female² — and the population as a whole stood at 2.6 per cent, 3.2 per cent, and 2.9 per cent, respectively, from 1971 to 2001.

With this framework as a backdrop, the objective of this study is to explore how expanded and anonymous urban environments provide various opportunities to women in various size–class cities. More specifically, the study looks at how economic and socio-demographic attributes of women migrants undergo changes with a transition from lower to higher order towns/cities. Since women are guided more by customs and ascribed gender roles than men, I argue that city size — a proxy for varying normative encoding for women — would have a stronger bearing on their employment profiles and patterns as compared to men.

The nature of quantitative data in this chapter necessarily limits the issues which could be captured, and yet the study throws open certain pointers regarding caste/class/social intersections affecting women’s work and raises questions that can be taken up for further research.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Following the introduction, the first is about the sources of data, conceptual clarification and methodology. This is followed by a discussion on the analytical framework, profiling of the gendered nature of work by migrants across urban centres as well as the interplay of several sociological and ideological constructs affecting labour market outcomes for both women and men in the second section. The final section sums up the study.

² The terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ have been used when all age groups are taken into consideration whereas ‘men’ and ‘women’ denote 15–59 age cohorts.

Data Source³ and Methodology

This study uses data on individual attributes (unit level) for urban areas by the National Sample Survey (NSS) for the year 1999–2000, the latest available data on migration. Urban areas can broadly be classified into three categories: small towns (population less than 50,000); medium towns/cities (population between 50,000 and 1,000,000) and million-plus cities (population more than 1,000,000). The migrants covered in the study are those moving from rural to urban and urban to urban locations.

Most urban-ward migration involves a search for employment opportunities. Therefore, much of the relocation occurs in the 15–59 age group, that is, nearly 78 per cent of men. Cities of various sizes, however, offer differential opportunities — in million-plus cities, this percentage goes up as high as 82 per cent as compared to 77 per cent and 74 per cent in medium and small towns, respectively. The situation is not very different for women migrants, although there is not much variation across size-classes.

The age group of migrants in this study (15–59) is not only the dominant group in the migration stream, but it also happens to be the working-age population. As stated earlier, women's married status takes precedence over their working status in official records.⁴ To overcome this limitation, this study takes into account women (and men) who were working both prior to and after migration as well as those who entered the labour market after migrating to cities, irrespective of their marital status.

While economic factors are basic to migration decisions for men, socio-cultural factors shape the migration pattern of women, particularly in the Indian context. Mobility over space is a gendered phenomenon and distances over which women move differ significantly

³ The figures used in this chapter are calculated from unit level data of National Sample Survey (NSS), Employment and Unemployment (Schedule 10 and 10.1) 55th Round, 1999–2000.

⁴ This is evident from the available statistics: about 9 per cent of total urban women were working prior to migration which had increased to about 21 per cent in the post-migration period, but only 3 per cent of the women reported 'employment' as the reason of movement. Some of this invisibility is also because of data limitations as the question on 'reasons for migration' does not allow for multiple responses (Raju 2006; Srivastava and Bhattacharyya 2003).

as compared to men (see Chapter 1 in this volume for more on this). Also, whether migration would be family or male-selective depends upon spaces available at the destination. Apart from these factors, educational attainments, marital status and caste/class locations have an important bearing on women’s mobility. Some of these issues are explored later in this chapter.

Spaces of Constraints and Opportunities

By and large, more women than men migrate to cities essentially on account of marriage as they move predominantly because of the practice of partilocality. However, this almost universal practice gets disrupted in million-plus cities largely because of ever-shrinking residential spaces as reflected through skewed sex ratios (SR = number of women per 1,000 men) in favour of men in million-plus cities (SR 1,179) relative to ‘women-friendly’ medium (SR 1,531) and small-size towns (SR 2,099).⁵ However, time changes this equation and with longer duration and a feeling of ‘settling down’, migrants bring their families with them, thus changing the sex composition therein (see Table 3.1; see also Premi 1980). The intersection of time and space is thus evident.

TABLE 3.1
Sex Ratio among Migrants by Duration of Residence across Urban Centres

| Duration of residence (in years) | Sex ratio | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | India | Million-plus cities | Medium towns/cities | Small towns |
| Less than 1 | 1,202 | 1,164 | 1,161 | 1,297 |
| 1 to 4 | 1,215 | 926 | 1,182 | 1,636 |
| 5 to 9 | 1,513 | 1,240 | 1,479 | 1,860 |
| 10 to 20 | 1,697 | 1,235 | 1,677 | 2,331 |
| 20 and above | 1,954 | 1,275 | 1,952 | 3,184 |
| Total | 1,563 | 1,179 | 1,531 | 2,099 |

Source: NSS (1999–2000).

⁵ As confirmed by several studies (Basu 2001; de Haan 1997), a distinction can be made about the migration pattern exhibited by women based on regions. Culture plays a crucial role in the male-selective migration characteristic of north India of leaving their women behind. This is in contrast with south India where entire families move.

Movement on account of employment among recent women migrants (those who moved to urban centres within the last five years) seems to have gone up (5 per cent) as compared to those who had moved prior to that (2 per cent). Million-plus cities provide better opportunities for work as about 7 per cent of recent women migrants had moved for work.

Constraints also appear in the form of spatial distances which a migrant has to traverse to seek fresher pastures. This particular aspect has been one of the least researched areas as far as migration amongst women is concerned with the exception of Ravenstein's 'Law of Migration' (1885) which states that women travel more frequently than men, but they move over shorter distances. Several contemporary studies on migration also point to women's restricted mobility over short distances (Premi 1980; Singh 2007).

In this study, migrants are classified into intra-district (within the same district); inter-district (between different districts) and inter-state (between different states) based on source regions. Though these are ambiguous categories,⁶ in the absence of a better alternative the study uses them as proxy for distance covered by the migrants (see Table 3.2).

In general, migration within the state is dominant in rural and urban streams and for men and women (Singh and Aggarwal 1998; Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003), but the million-plus cities are marked by male-selective migration (see Table 3.2). Most of these inter-state migrants, particularly men coming from rural areas (85 per cent), are pulled towards larger cities for livelihood purposes. The mobility pattern of women is somewhat different — urban women are mobile over greater distances as compared to their rural counterparts.

This chapter is concerned with women and work, but at the risk of digression, I turn to women who move to urban centres for education because educational acquisition, in a way, contributes

⁶ Equating inter-district and inter-state with distance is problematic as the location between two places can be shorter even if they are located in two different states as compared to two places within a single state. But still it can be used as a proxy variable to denote 'distance' because it is not always the physical distance involved; an inter-state move may mean overcoming ethnic, cultural, language and other barriers.

TABLE 3.2
Migrants by Source Regions and Sex across Urban Centres

| Men | Rural-Urban | | | | Urban-Urban | | | |
|----------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | India | Million-plus cities | Medium towns/cities | Small towns | India | Million-plus cities | Medium towns/cities | Small towns |
| Intra-district | 33.0 | 8.9 | 39.0 | 53.8 | 30.7 | 20.5 | 32.2 | 37.9 |
| Inter-district | 37.9 | 48.2 | 34.6 | 30.2 | 46.0 | 45.9 | 46.0 | 45.3 |
| Inter-state | 29.1 | 42.9 | 26.4 | 16.0 | 23.4 | 33.0 | 21.8 | 16.8 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Women | | | | | | | | |
| Intra-district | 49.0 | 20.2 | 53.0 | 62.1 | 39.3 | 32.8 | 39.5 | 44.0 |
| Inter-district | 35.8 | 51.9 | 33.0 | 29.2 | 42.7 | 43.2 | 43.6 | 40.9 |
| Inter-state | 15.2 | 27.9 | 14.0 | 8.7 | 18.0 | 24.0 | 16.9 | 15.1 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: NSS (1999-2000).

to expanding opportunities and activity spaces, thereby promoting self-confidence and greater autonomy (Duraismy 2002; Stecklov et al. 2008). It would be of interest to see how gendered identities limit a social good as elementary as education. In India, education is often valued for its instrumental content — employability. Women lose in terms of access to education because the tangible outcomes in the form of their employment, if any, are likely to accrue at distant places away from their natal home (Fan 2003). Moreover, women's mobility often gets restricted by real and imagined dangers for their safety (and religious expectations), confining them to the home and domestic responsibilities.

Though contemporary migration is taking place in a world marked by a deeper belief in the importance of equality of opportunity across a socio-political divide (Bhatt 2009), women's restricted mobility is still reflected even if they move for educational purposes. In India, very few women move to acquire education (1 per cent as compared to 6 per cent for men). As will be seen later, educated migrant women seem to have an advantage compared to their illiterate or lowly-educated counterparts in that the former category is usually salaried. Ironically, however, the salaried jobs are primarily in teaching and health services, customarily seen as 'feminine' in nature.

Possession of education and skills has increased people's mobility by opening up new vistas of employment where their skills are valued. Whether this happens in the case of women and how gender/caste/class dynamics play out are some of the issues that I take up. In doing so, I propose that different size-class cities, by virtue of their variegated occupational opportunities and social milieu, be seen as differentiated social spaces for women.

The movement of illiterate men to urban centres does not vary across different size-class cities, and yet, million-plus cities seem to offer more employment opportunities for them: 81 per cent moving on account of employment related reasons as compared to 71 per cent and 57 per cent in medium and small towns, respectively. In contrast, illiterate women are mostly present in small towns. An intriguing inference can perhaps be made: male selective migration combined with the absence of women in million-plus cities and to some extent in medium towns/cities seem to indicate that they are not 'women-friendly' if they are illiterate, particularly so if they do not belong to underprivileged groups! This is conjectured because those illiterate women who do migrate to million-plus cities come from

poor socio-economic backgrounds (72 per cent from scheduled and other backward castes). What is being hinted at is that the metros have occupational avenues which the low caste, illiterate and poor women can access without threat to their social hierarchies, whereas for illiterate and higher-caste women, job opportunities are rather limited withholding them from migrating.

Even fewer highly educated women — those with graduate degrees and above — migrate relative to men with a similar level of educational qualifications, that is, 10 per cent of women as compared to 20 per cent of men. Interestingly, however, although the overall quantum of educated women migrants to small towns is half of those migrating to medium and million-plus cities, more women in small towns have migrated there on account of employment. It seems that highly educated women moving to million-plus cities somehow have a longer gestation period in terms of waiting for the opportune moment to find jobs that are suited to them (Das 2006), an assumption which needs further probing.

Migrant Women and Work: Limited Options

Women may face a double-edged consequence as a result of migration. In some cases, mobility may force them to give up their working status, while in some other cases migration may bring in more opportunities for them to enter the labour market. In order to capture both these possibilities, this chapter deals with a comparative analysis of the 'continuing workers' (those working both prior to and after migration) and 'fresh entrants' to the labour market after migrating to cities.

More than half the migrant men and nearly one-tenth of the migrant women were workers at the time of moving to urban centres. Around 17 per cent of the women (those who were non-workers at the time of migration) started working after they migrated. In general, migration seems to enhance work opportunities (32 percentage points for men as compared to 16 percentage points for women); while million-plus cities fare better for men, it is the small towns in the case of women. This is essentially because small towns offer many agricultural activities where women predominate within the town limits.

Work done by migrants is divided into three broad 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 the most erratic sort of employment with low bargaining power and no social security, leading to uncertainties. 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 borne entirely by the person. It is often argued, particularly in official and masculine discourses, that self-employed women, mainly working in household enterprises, are protected from the outside world and are, therefore, safer. However, scholars have routinely pointed out the work insecurities they face (Srivastava 2005; Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003). Thus, regular salaried jobs remain the best option available, with assured wages and various social security schemes.

A classification of women, both continuing workers and fresh entrants, by their work status shows that self-employment emerges as the main avenue of employment (33 per cent for continuing workers and 52 per cent for fresh entrants). The all-India pattern is reflected in medium and small-sized towns. But million-plus cities have a comparatively lower proportion of women in self-employment, particularly among fresh entrants. Self-employment is not that important in the case of men. That this should be the case should not come as a surprise as women's primary location has customarily been seen to be within the domestic sphere (Mitra 2005). In the Indian context, this construct continues to be so pervasive that even high-end women workers do not seem able to escape it.

Regular salaried jobs show an increase in the case of working women migrants, particularly in million-plus cities. However, it may be pointed out that as many as 42 per cent of fresh entrants in regular salaried jobs are illiterate and slightly less than work as housemaids. Women working prior to migration to urban centres and who continue to work have lower illiteracy (18 per cent) and about one-tenth of them are domestic servants. This seems to suggest that working women with some level of literacy are more likely to move as compared to illiterate women and also find jobs other than working in someone's home. This general observation can be extended to urban centres across size.

Self-employment has been the largest avenue for workers in urban India. Interestingly, where such avenues are restricted, women's participation in the labour market drops. Conversely, if their workforce participation is high, they are mostly self-employed. Migrant

women workers are no exception barring those in million-plus cities. This is because agriculture, which absorbs most of the self-employed women, is conspicuous by its absence in these cities. This is not the case in medium and small towns where fresh entrants with no prior work experience find some work in agriculture. Besides agriculture, manufacturing activities provide migrant workers, both men and women, with jobs. Within manufacturing, certain industries such as food processing, textile and machine building are more attractive options. Once again, million-plus cities, by virtue of their diversified economic base, offer more options in manufacturing whereas workers in medium and small towns are mainly in food processing and textile industries.

Regular salaried jobs are much valued for obvious reasons. However, women in this category are mainly in the educational sector, especially in medium and small towns (30 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, as compared to around 20 per cent in million-plus cities). The health sector is another important avenue for women workers in small and medium towns/cities. It is well-documented in the literature that teaching and health-related jobs are particularly suited for women as they are the market extension of the caring activities. Limited in its exposition, this observation suggests that in million-plus cities/metros women have been able to move away from roles stereotypically assigned to them (Agrawal 2006).

One of the issues which has not received much attention in Indian scholarship, but is crucial to understand why gendered labour division continues to prevail, is the phenomenon of domestic workers. A prominent phenomenon in million-plus cities, domestic work does not follow a conventional model. The presence of domestic workers in the job market is not only on account of their illiterate and unskilled status, but also because of lack of work experience. The share of post-migration fresh entrants to the labour market as domestic workers was much higher, at 16 per cent, as compared to those who had some work experience and who accounted for 10 per cent. As one group of women gets replaced by another, there is little threat to the status quo. In other words, as hired maidservants meet the gender-specific pattern of labour demand in cities for household work and childcare on payment, the prevailing distribution of work between men and women remains unquestioned. Ironically, it is the same housework when performed within the confines of home which carries no value, but becomes 'work' and paid for when removed from its original location (Gulati 1997, 2006).

Women, Marriage and Work: Shrinking Activity Spaces

Most migration studies show that a non-trivial proportion of women's mobility is associated with marriage (Bilsborrow 1992; Fan and Huang 1998). In urban areas also, the main reason for women's mobility continues to be on account of marriage (as per 1999–2000 data, about 89 per cent of rural women migrated for marriage as compared to 59 per cent urban women). Given the essential construct of marriage and responsibilities associated with it, although urban migration enables women to expand their activity spaces in many ways, they cannot escape household responsibilities routinely assigned to them. If so, it can be argued that if women have to join the paid workforce, they would opt for employment which can be carried out at home — self-employed in household enterprises as compared to those who are unmarried.

More than 70 per cent migrant men and 87 per cent migrant women in India are married. However, more unmarried men are migrants (28 per cent) as compared to their female counterparts (7 per cent). This can probably be explained by the safety and security concerns of their families, lowering their propensity to move. In contrast, more widowed and divorced or separated women in India are mobile as compared to men — about 6 per cent widowed and divorced or separated women and 1 per cent men are migrants in India.

As pointed out earlier, marriage makes its own demands on how it intersects pathways to work patterns. As marriage is almost universal, most workers would also be married. But there is an interesting observation — in million-plus cities, more unmarried women are in the workforce (25 per cent as compared to 17 per cent married women) as compared to medium (15 per cent as compared to 17 per cent married women) and small towns (15 per cent as compared to 26 per cent married women). Out of unmarried women workers in million-plus cities, about three-fourths are in regular salaried jobs as compared to about half in medium and small towns. Thus, million-plus cities appear more open to unmarried women working in regular jobs in places located outside their homes. Also, work demands and responsibilities in million-plus cities may be such that it requires a more clearly demarcated home/workplace division — a proposition which requires further probe. That this may be the case can be conjectured through another observation. That is, self-employment

among married women in small towns is much higher — 56 per cent as compared to 47 per cent and 48 per cent in million-plus and medium towns/cities, respectively. Though million-plus cities provide a somewhat higher proportion of regular salaried jobs to married women, the contribution of medium and small towns in this respect is minimal.

In the absence of the main earning member in the family, widowed and divorced or separated women have to work more. As many as 48 per cent women belonging to this category are workers in India. No marked variation is observed across different size-class cities. Overall, these women are almost equally engaged in three different kinds of work. As self-employed, they are mainly agricultural workers (23 per cent), while as regular salaried workers they are mainly engaged as domestic servants (55 per cent). In the case of men, their marital status does not hinder either the level of their workforce participation or where they work — most of them are in regular salaried jobs working outside the home.

Migrant Workers: Caste/Class Intercepts

Historically, caste has been the key axis of social and economic stratification in India and responsible for major inequalities in access to education, health and jobs. This variable is used in this study to analyse how social status enhances or restricts mobility over geographical space, how caste affiliations structure work status, and how these dynamics vary across different size-class cities.

Socially, migrants are divided into four categories: Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Castes and others. As far as mobility is concerned, more than half the women and one-third of the men in each social group are migrants. Scheduled Tribe men and women generally migrate towards million-plus cities. It is often argued that higher-caste women's entry into the labour market is constrained by their caste status because in some cases behavioural roles are more restrictive for them. For example, the norms of seclusion, their location within the home and non-participation in employment activities are regarded as a matter of family honour (Das 2006; Srinivas 1977). One can also argue that women from higher castes are likely to belong to well-to-do families and may not be compelled to work as much as the others. The construct of men as the primary bread-winner overrides caste and other social barriers for them; it

is observed that work participation for them does not vary across caste groups and urban centres. These observations are substantiated by data, however limited it may be, as the so-called 'higher'-caste women's workforce participation rate is not only much lower (16 per cent) as compared to women belonging to the rest of the categories (around 30 per cent), their proportion does not vary much across size-class cities.

Though higher work participation rates are observed among the backward classes, they tend to dominate in categories of lower work in the job hierarchy — overall, 43 per cent of higher-caste women are in regular salaried jobs, whereas this share is reduced to 20 per cent in the case of Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Castes. Since million-plus cities have a relatively higher share of salaried jobs, all castes are represented in that category. More importantly, however, while women from higher castes are generally in the educational sector, women from backward castes are mainly employed as domestic maids. Caste thus has a significant bearing on access to opportunities which is rather limited as far as women from disadvantaged sections of society are concerned who occupy marginal spaces in the labour market in terms of protection, labour rights, wages and so on.

Although the relationship between poverty and women's participation in the labour market is ambivalent, it has increasingly been recognised that women too migrate for economic reasons, a departure from the usual relegation of their migration to the private sphere of marriage. Most often, women migrate to earn a living for their families in order to reduce poverty and increase the level of productivity, education and health of their own and their families (Omelaniuk 2005). Thus, even if women migrate for economic reasons, it may not always be seen as voluntary or for upward mobility. Instead, it can be a compulsion generated in the interest of capital (Vijay 2005).

This section tries to look into some of the inter-linkages between poverty, migration and work. In the absence of direct measurement of poverty, Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure classes (MPCE) have been used as a proxy variable. The lowest two and the highest two consumption classes have been clubbed together to estimate the 'poorest of the poor' and the 'richest of the rich' components of migrants. Rural and urban nomenclature in Table 3.3 denotes the source region from where men and women had migrated.

TABLE 3.3
Migrants by Source Regions and MPCE Classes

| Monthly per capita consumption expenditure (₹) | Men | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|---------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | India | | Million-plus cities | | Medium towns/cities | | Small towns | | Rural | | Urban | |
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| 0-350 | 28.6 | 26.0 | 24.2 | 21.1 | 29.8 | 27.8 | 31.9 | 26.8 | | | | |
| 1500 and above | 4.9 | 15.4 | 4.0 | 21.9 | 5.3 | 14.3 | 5.3 | 12.2 | | | | |
| Rest | 66.5 | 58.6 | 71.8 | 57.0 | 64.9 | 57.9 | 62.8 | 61.0 | | | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | | | | |
| Women | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0-350 | 41.7 | 30.0 | 37.1 | 21.5 | 38.1 | 29.8 | 46.3 | 35.0 | | | | |
| 1500 and above | 4.2 | 17.7 | 5.7 | 27.2 | 5.8 | 17.8 | 2.3 | 12.1 | | | | |
| Rest | 54.1 | 52.3 | 57.2 | 51.3 | 56.1 | 52.4 | 51.4 | 52.9 | | | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | | | | |

Source: NSS (1999-2000).

The analysis seems to suggest that as compared to the highest consumption classes, poorer people were likely to migrate to urban areas. Whereas the differences between rural and urban men were not significant in the poorest consumption classes, the highest end of consumption classes is dominated by the urban to urban flow rather than from rural to urban areas. Moreover, million-plus cities record a greater inflow of affluent urban migrants as compared to the rest of the urban centres. This may be due to a combination of factors such as employment venues available to them, other infrastructural facilities and also because only the relatively more affluent sections can afford to bear the higher living expense in cities (Kundu and Sarengi 2007).

As compared with their urban counterparts, poorer women migrating to urban areas are from rural backgrounds, but these women do not necessarily move to million-plus cities; they migrate to smaller towns. This seems to reiterate what has been observed earlier, that million-plus cities are women-friendly, particularly if they are educated and belong to affluent classes.

Poverty works as a trigger for poor men to work — their proportion is higher than the non-poor, especially in million-plus cities. About 83 per cent of the poor men in India are in the workforce. The corresponding figures in million-plus cities, medium and small towns are 88 per cent, 82 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. The poverty–work link is not so direct in the case of poor women. No variation in work participation rates is observed among the poor and rich women migrants in million-plus and medium towns/cities. In contrast, small towns have varying workforce participation rates for poor women (30 per cent) as compared to those who are rich (23 per cent). This also has to do with the kind of possibilities small towns offer to poor, illiterate women. It may be recalled that small towns still have some agricultural activity which is carried out by self-employed women. Since the poor in general have lower or no access to other human capital resources such as education and skill attainment, most poor migrants, especially women, also work as casual labour. A much lower proportion of them are in regular salaried jobs. City size makes a difference, although around 40 per cent of poor women in million-plus cities are in regular salaried jobs as compared to 24 per cent and 14 per cent in medium and small towns, respectively. These women, as discussed earlier, mainly work as domestic servants.

Socio-economic Interdependencies in Migration

The discussion so far identifies several socio-economic factors that seem to affect how migrants get integrated/isolated in the labour market, independent of each other. The logistic regression⁷ attempted here (see Table 3.4) looks at these factors in an interdependent manner controlling for several socio-economic parameters. This is done mainly to see that the nature of work done by the migrants, especially by women, is determined not only by their status as migrants, but also by several factors such as education, marital status and social grouping.

The multinomial regression results confirm what has been pointed out earlier. The relationship between literacy/education and the scope for better employment is clear as the probability of literates to work as casual labour is much lower than illiterates and educated workers who are more likely to be in regular salaried jobs. This holds true for both the sexes at an all-India level and in small towns in particular. As discussed earlier, the metros can absorb even illiterate workers to a greater extent because of the diverse job/menial tasks base. As compared to men, educated women's chances to be in regular salaried jobs are much higher across the city/town sizes — return on education thus seems to be much higher for them (Duraiswamy 2002).

Marital status does not constrain men as much as it does married women, yet an interesting relationship emerges — currently married, widowed and divorced or separated men are less likely to be in casual work (46 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively) than unmarried men at all-India level as well as in small, medium and million-plus cities. This may be reflective of longer work experience of married, widowed and divorced or separated men who may have graduated from casual work to regular salaried jobs over a period of time — an issue which the available data could not address.

⁷ Multinomial logistic regressions are done in cases where the dependent variable is not in a binary form, that is, the dependent variable is not restricted to two categories. In the present analysis, the dependent variable is the 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 and so on.

| Regular Salaried | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| Educational Standard | | | | | | | | | |
| Literate | 2.52** | 4.42** | 1.81** | 2.06** | 2.78** | 4.51** | 3.06** | 6.30** | - |
| Illiterate (ref.) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Marital Status | | | | | | | | | |
| Currently Married | 1.11* | 0.30** | 0.60** | 0.27** | 1.18* | 0.38** | 1.63** | 0.29** | - |
| Widowed and Divorced/Separated | 0.99 | 0.64** | 0.78 | 0.48* | 0.87 | 0.85 | 1.62 | 0.58* | - |
| Never Married (ref.) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Social Group | | | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Tribe | 2.20** | 1.27 | 1.25 | 1.08 | 2.26** | 0.96 | 2.85** | 2.02** | - |
| Scheduled Caste | 1.24** | 1.15 | 1.18 | 1.18 | 1.39** | 1.32* | 1.16 | 1.04 | - |
| Other BackwardClass | 0.85 | 0.50** | 0.88 | 0.68** | 0.89** | 0.43** | 0.79** | 0.60* | - |
| Others (ref.) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Source: NSS (1999-2000).

Notes: * Significance level is less than equal to 0.05.

**Significance level is less than equal to 0.001.

In the case of women migrants as casual labour, most of the statistical results are not significant. Only in two cases, the probabilities of widowed, divorced or separated and married women to be in casual labour, particularly in small towns, are half that of unmarried women. However, the regression confirms, as already hypothesised, that unmarried women are less burdened with household work. Without any size-wise variation across urban centres, the probability of married, widowed and divorced or separated women to be in regular salaried jobs is lower than that of unmarried women.

Membership in a particular social group determines the work status of women migrants. For example, the regression result shows that as compared to 'high-caste women' (others), women belonging to lower castes including the tribes were more likely to work as casual labourers at the all-India level and in million-plus cities in particular. In the case of regular salaried jobs, the results are not in sync with what was expected. At an all-India level, the probability of Other Backward Caste women to be in regular salaried jobs is nearly half that of other 'high caste' women, but city/town sizes do not follow any particular pattern.

Conclusion

This chapter draws from secondary sources and focuses on those who continued to be in the workforce prior to and after migration, and fresh entrants to the labour market after migration in different size-class urban settlements. The underlying argument that rural to urban and urban to urban migration is not to be seen as an undifferentiated event. The opportunities and occupational avenues available in different urban settings intercept some of the conventionally hypothesised inter-linkages between determining factors in terms of gendered responses to the labour market. While the million-plus cities seem to be more women-friendly, particularly if they are educated and without the familial baggage of domestic responsibilities, small towns seem to be more traditional in their acceptance of single-women migrants. Million-plus cities have diversified activities and can absorb illiterate and unskilled labour whereas this is not the case with small towns. Even as urban spaces are liberating for women in general, the caste/class nexus and the gendered constructs about what women are ideally suited for — teaching and (health) — continue to affect market outcomes.

To conclude, working women with prior work experience as well as fresh entrants to the labour market (while destabilising certain established stereotypical gendered codes woven around familial and domestic responsibilities) do not escape the gender/caste/class intercepts and yet different size–class urban sites allow them to negotiate expanded economic as well as social spaces to varying degrees. It is intriguing that despite differentiations in work profiles in urban spaces, self-employment emerges as the most crucial avenue for women to enter the world of (formal) work. As it is, much of the labour pool is largely illiterate or lowly educated and unskilled, suited mainly for petty businesses and self-employed activities. However, workplaces for self-employment, particularly for women, are largely located within home spaces which allow women to participate in labour markets, yet at the same time, not disturb the socially sanctioned stereotypical roles of ‘homemakers’ assigned to them. It can be said that spatial differentiation is not simple acts of innocence. Instead, spatial and social processes often get interwoven in a complex and subtle manner to signify the ideological underpinnings — in this case related to gender — of a given milieu.