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### YOUNG WOMEN AS INTERNAL MIGRANTS WORKING IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

*Vallary Patric\**

#### Abstract:

Human migration is a universal phenomenon and is accompanied by economic development. Migration is one of the most challenging demographic issues facing the world today. Migrant groups are willing to move to places with labour shortages, they bring with them skills that may be scarce in many destination countries – from highly qualified to the unskilled labour in agriculture, construction or low skilled fields. Migration of women for work and economic motives has attracted serious research attention only recently. As Thapan (2008) points out, many studies perceive migration as being a male movement with women either being left behind or follow their men folk as dependents. Though women are seen engaged in production work outside the household after migration, they are seen as secondary earners and dependents in the process of migration. Internal migration in India is expected to touch 400 million as stated by Census 2011 (Rajan 2013). Over half the global figure of 740 million and almost twice as China's estimated 221 million. According to NSSO 2007-08 and Census report 2001, women constitute 80 percent of the total internal migrants. Internal migrants are diverse in their characteristics due to varied degree of education, income, skills and varying profiles of caste, religion, family composition, age etc. Most of the migrants are young, energetic group with majority from the Scheduled tribe and Scheduled caste group and they are protected by the Indian Constitution because of their historic, social and economic inequality.

**Key concepts:** Migration, Internal migrants, women migrants, construction sector, marginalized groups, push factors, labour legislations, economic development.

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*\*Assistant Professor,  
Department of Social Work,  
Loyola College, Chennai*

## Introduction

Migration is an important function of human situations and it reflects human nature which continues to exist within the most testing situations of both natural and artificial. History reveals that migration has existed, but with the process of globalisation and beginning of the world economy, migration has added unique significance to the community and the society at large. The consequences of migration have resulted in changes in the economic system with serious income disparity, agrarian misery, inadequate employment generation, the widespread increase of the informal zone and appalling conditions in both the sending and the receiving regions (Chowdhury, et.al, 2012).

The Census of India 2011, defines a migrant as a person residing in a place other than his/her place of birth. (Place of Birth definition) or one who has changed his/her usual place of residence to another place. (Change in usual place of residence or UPR definition) Report from Census of India (2011).

Internal Migration makes up 1/3rd of India's Population, as Jairam Ramesh (2013), refers that internal migrants in India are expected to touch 400 million and as per the 2011 census, India's internal migrants are over half the global figure of 740 million and almost double the estimate of China's 221 million. The remittance of these internal migrants, comprising a third of India's population, are estimated to account for anywhere between Rs.70,000 crore and Rs.1,20,000 crore. The increase in

internal migration has exceeded more than the total estimated migrants from India to other countries which is just 1.4 million. There has been more attention paid to the policies of emigrants than to internal migrants who are a major proportion in India, completely excluded from the Government, which has failed to provide legal or social protection to this vulnerable group - reported by the UNESCO on "Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India", released by Rural Development Minister, Jairam Ramesh.

Internal migrants are diverse in their characteristics as they have widely varying degrees of education, income levels, skills and varying profiles in terms of caste, religion, family composition, age and other characteristics. There is no evidence to prove this data on a national level, but micro surveys suggest that most migrants are a young, energetic group with the majority of them are from the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste groups that are explicitly protected in India's constitution because of their historic, social and economic inequality. The labour migrants are employed in employment sectors including construction, domestic work, textile and brick manufacturing, transportation, mining and quarrying and agriculture.

The National Sample Survey Organisation, 2007-08 projects that women constitute 80 percent of the total internal migrants. "There isn't enough data on women migrant labour because of the assumption that most women migrate because of marriage. This assumption blocks further analysis of the

women migrants engaged in paid labour and an understanding of how their vulnerabilities are being compounded by contemporary economic practices and not just because of historical or cultural baggage. This leads to the "invisibilization" and undermining of women in policies too," said Indu Agnihotri from the Centre for Women's Development Studies (2012). The report also estimated that about 30 percent of the migrants are youth aged 15-29 years and another 15 million are children. The migration trends are likely to increase in future with push factors such as economic crises, political instability and global environmental change, it warned.

Internal migrants who are short-term seasonal/migrants oscillate back and forth between the place of residence and destination and therefore constitute a floating population, which is between 15 million and 100 million as per different estimates. This impermanent status often makes them lose their social protection benefits which are mostly linked to their place of residence as per the report. Internal migrants are discriminated as 'outsiders', which keeps them away from legal rights, public services and social protection programmes. The internal migrants are involved in cheap labour doing the dirtiest, dangerous and degrading jobs which the local residents hesitate to do. Migrant workers may be considered as a burden to society, but their cheap labour is a subsidy and contribution to the national GDP. The remittance from migrants has led to an increased expenditure on health and

education, helping to build up human capital (Jairam Ramesh, 2013).

The Economic Survey 2016-17 highlights that interstate migrant workers in India have increased substantially to 90 lakhs annually between 2011-16 compared to the previous years. The survey is an analysis of census data of 2011 using the railway data in passenger traffic in the unreserved category 2011-16. The interstate labour mobility average was between 50 - 65 lakh people in 2001 - 2011, yielding an inter-state migrant population of six crores and an inter-district migration as high as eight crores. According to a new cohort-based migration matrix, women migrants have significantly increased and are more than the rate of male migration in the 2000's. According to the survey, the pattern of migration was from less affluent states out-migrating to rich metropolises that attract large inward flow of labourers. Delhi was the largest recipient of migrant workers accounting for more than half the migration in 2015 -16. While Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar accounted for half the total of out migrants. There has been a considerable shift towards the southern states with the opening of the new migration corridor in recent years (Anumeha Yadav, Indian Express, 2017).

***Scheduled Caste and Tribes  
Predominate the Construction Sector***

The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (Government of India, 1974), 'Towards Equality' made the following observations on construction workers:

According to the first National Commission on Labour (NCL), the employment of contract labour is more pronounced in the mining and construction industry. The construction undertaken by the Public Works Departments of the Government in 1957, employed 60 percent of their labour on contracts. The Government is the largest employer in public construction, such as dams, bridges, roads and public buildings that makes up the major share of expenditure in the construction industry.

1. The Committee initiated two surveys in Bihar and Delhi. Chitra Ghosh (1984) summarized the findings of the two surveys and a third survey in Andhra Pradesh on women construction workers and the results presented that women within their social context belonged to the Harijan and tribal communities. They were the major groups represented, although they comprise only 15 percent and 5 percent of the Indian population respectively. Among the construction workers in Delhi, 96 percent were Harijan migrant labourers from Rajasthan and Harijans with tribals together comprised 90 percent of the Andhra sample. Most of the women workers in construction work are as young as an average of 25 years and

all labourers were illiterate (Ghosh, Chitra, ed. by Lebra, Paulson, Everett, Promila & Co, 1984).

2. There has been a remarkable change in the demographic picture with more construction workers entering into Delhi from the neighbouring states and most of them are from the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes which is very significant. These migrants are from very poor villages in search of work and are those who own the least or are landless labourers from rural India who form the major chunk of construction workers. Extracts from: 'Towards Equality' Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (Government of India, 1974).
3. Not much information is available, particularly in rural communities where the most vulnerable groups are at the mercy of the contractor or the employer who hires workers as low-wage opportunities in the rural sector has shrunk in the recent years. The migrants are totally dependent on the thekadar (contractor) as they come from distant places and are completely cut off from their local community, it is almost an alien place where even the local language is new to them. The thekadar hire them with a sum of money to pay off their travel to the work site and they are likely to end up as bonded labourers. Though there are protective legislatures for migrants such as the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act 1979, it is hardly implemented in favour of the migrants.

4. In most of the state, migrants are not accepted by the locals who react indifferently as they are perceived to take away their local jobs. There always exists a situation of hostility which makes them even more vulnerable. An example would be the state of Kerala, where the migrant workers are excluded from registering themselves in the State Welfare Board.

The report of the National Commission for self-employed women and women in the informal sector, states that for the first time importance is given to the contribution of marginalized poor women in rural and urban areas especially for women from the informal sector. It included self-employed and wage labour paid and unpaid workers as well as contractual employees included by the Commission. From the various studies by the Governmental and non-governmental organizations, it was found that one third of all households were supported by women. Further, 94 percent of women were found to be working in the unorganized sector. One of the causes for exploitation of women workers was lack of organization in the informal sector. Thus, based on the various findings many valuable recommendations were made in the report. It included, due recognition of women's work as house makers, as economic producers in a broad context of those paid and unpaid workers performed at home and outside, and finally, the need for a credit body and training programmes to enhance remunerations to improve living conditions of poor women.

A special reference of women labour absorption in construction work is much more pronounced than for male workers. There is an increase in the employment rate for women workers than men when there is a demand for labour. At the same time, the fall in the female workers is higher when there is shrinkage in the workforce than what it can be for their male counterpart. Though women workers appear to form a reserve army in the construction industry, they are the first to get retrenched when work slows down.

Although the construction workers are covered under various acts like the Minimum Wages Act, The Contract Labour Act and the Inter-state Migrant Workers Act, these Acts exist on paper, but in practice they are blatantly violated by the employers. Several steps which are likely to help these workers which includes: (i) stringent enforcement of the provisions of the laws, (ii) strict punishment for violation, (iii) allowing trade unions and NGOs to file cases of violation of the labour laws, (iv) welfare programmes to be financed by the employers or contractors, (v) provision of educational training for upgrading their skills, (vi) designing of tools and equipment to make the work less hazardous and less arduous for women, (vii) provision of welfare facilities like crèches, medical doctor/mobile dispensary etc., (viii) organization and empowerment of women construction workers to protect their rights and fight against exploitation (Extracts from Shramshakti, report of the National Commission on "Self-employed Women

and Women in the Informal Sector” June, 1988)

### **Participation of Women in Migration Stream**

Though on a global scale it is ascertained that women are employed in a low-skilled occupation, yet there are many who are in the skilled professions such as health, education and social service which are traditionally dominated domains. A major chunk of women migrants is found to be employed in the nursing sector. Women benefit through economic and socio-cultural empowerment facilitated through labour migration. Women migrants are more vulnerable as migration may not be safe for them and can get affected to a variety of risks arising out of their mobility. There have been instances of human rights violation at every stage of their migratory process compared to their male counterparts. They take it up as a challenge to deal with difficult living and working experience, with increased health risks, lack of access to social service and various forms of abuse to the extent of confiscation of passport by their employer. The situation is much worse for women who enter gender-segregated workplaces that are largely informal and unregulated. They are deprived of bargaining opportunities for establishing a network to receive information and social support. Women migrants are vulnerable to harassment, intimidation or threats as well as economic and sexual exploitation including trafficking and racial discrimination. Many times they face incarceration and /or deportation if they attempt to leave their employer. The author, in his study of female migration in

India, emphasizes that migration patterns in India indicate that the percentage of migrants to total enumerated population is consistently declining among both male and female populations. Employment among men and marriage among females were found to be the most dominating factor behind their movement. Census data from 1961 to 1991 are used to examine the migration levels, reasons for migration are assessed through type of migration streams, workforce participation rate and educational level of the migrant (Singh, 1998).

As Sørensen (2005) points out, female migration is linked to new global economic transformations and the resulting restructuring of the labour force. The process has led to new groups of migrants emerging, including both young single women and female family breadwinners who move both independently and under the authority of older relatives and There are four principal types of women migrants, based on marital status and the reason for migration as identified by Thadani & Todaro (1984), they are:

1. Married women migrating in search of employment
2. Unmarried women migrating in search of employment
3. Unmarried women migrating for marriage reasons
4. Married women engaged in associational migration with no thought of employment.

Agnihotri & Muzumdar (2009), in their study, observed that the macro survey of migration in India (NSS) '2007-08', estimated that 327.7 million people in the country were internal migrants. 80 percent of them are female and the total migrants accounted for nearly 29 percent of the country's population. It is also estimated that there is a striking increase in female migration that has been driven by marriage and not employment. During post-migration, women seem to take up work in order to support their family income in four occupations namely, agricultural labour, paid domestic work, construction and brick making which dominate the migration process for almost more than 60 percent of all migrant women workers. In all these occupations women are involved in hard and tedious manual labour, which are eventually casual in nature.

Mahapatro (2010), once again stresses that female migration has been on the increase and the issue of female migration has not been sufficiently explored in migration studies. The neglect of research on women's migration is attributed to a number of factors, including the emphasis placed on economic theories of migration where migration is seen as motivated by economic opportunities. Economic reasons for male migration and social and family-related reasons for female migration. There has been gender bias in the analysis of migration pattern explained in the context of India's historical, institutional and socio-cultural norms that characterise women playing economic and social roles as secondary

to those of men. As migration process is usually male-centric, the dynamics underlying female migration remain unexplored.

Muzumdar et.al (2013), in her study on 'Migration and Gender in India' presents key findings of a research project on gender and migration at the Centre for Women's Development Studies. The survey results organised from 2009 to 2011 across 20 states present a consolidated summary of meso-level studies on types of migration, pattern of female labour migration, consolidation of work and civic life of women.

### **Determinants of Female Migration**

People move from one place to another when they encounter either a natural disaster or as a direct result of inadequate economic or social opportunities in the country of origin and presumably attracted by the superior opportunities in the area on immigration. Families which include women and men migrate to improve their living conditions and to support their children and sometimes it is to escape the political chaos. There exists a dynamic interaction between individual decision and the socio-economic context in which decisions are taken as pointed out by the recent Human Development Report (2009). Though impoverishment and the need to support family provide women and men strong reasons for migration, poverty may not always be the only reason rather it also depends on the community settings, traditions, family and individual circumstances.

There are other factors that contribute significantly to decisions of migration, such as increasing demand for labour in the service market in places of destination, family obligation, unemployment, low wages with the absence of social and economic opportunities. Women usually have difficulty in decision making with financial restrictions than do men, but their income earning capacity would empower them and loosen traditional constraints especially on female mobility. Women are still highly dependent on their spouse to migrate to a new place as in many countries, women risk losing their residency rights in case of domestic violence when they decide to leave their spouse.

Marriage is also one of the reasons for women to migrate. Arranged marriages are quite common in the Indian subcontinent and it is believed that both men and women lead a lifelong supportive partnership, not forgetting that for most of them such marriages are described as forced. The age of women, their position within the family and the stage of their life cycle includes children, whether left behind, their capacity to manage children who accompany them as well as the presence of family members to replace them in domestic activities are other factors in women's migration (Internationalis.C, 2010).

When women are involved in migration it has to be closely scrutinized in order to prevent risks and promote new opportunities for women and their families. Women's decision to migrate depends on many factors such as labour

market, discrimination and exclusion, unfavourable legislation and the impact of people left behind. Migration also exposes women to new opportunities, establish contacts with different people in different places and indulge in the transcultural dialogue between groups and subgroups. There is a great influence on the openness of new generations across cultures and relationships established with the local population and they become agents of transculturality (Mahapatro, 2010).

***Levels of poverty, inequality and their influence on female migration:***

Poverty and inequality, promote gender inequality between men and women to access information, to take a decision and act as powerful forces influencing female migration. However, the level of poverty and gender inequality affects the size of migration. Experts define it as a *migration hump*: migration of women is most likely to occur at the intermediate stages of economic development and when improvements in the status of women can be noticed. Extreme impoverishment makes international migration difficult, simply because people have few resources for migration, with transportation as well as communication structures being poor. Higher educational levels stimulate aspirations for suitable employment, enhances knowledge about the world and promotes capacity for action.

Migration can contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women by providing women migrants with income and status, autonomy, freedom,



and the self-esteem that comes with employment. Women become more assertive as they see more opportunities opening up before them. Moving to a new country exposes women to new ideas and social norms that can promote their rights and enable them to participate more fully in society. It can also have a positive influence on achieving greater equality for them in their country of origin. On the other hand, women from the poor environment who lack opportunities are easy target of traffickers who promise them richer economic and social future abroad. They are lured into forced labour, forced prostitution and live in inhumane conditions. It is very important by both sending and the transit regions to provide information and empower women to take preventive efforts on possible risk (Internationalis, 2010).

In 'A Literature Review on Understanding Women and Migration' the author contends that female migration is growing faster than male migrants in countries that receive a high level of migrants. The trend is referred to as "Feminization of Migration". The author further proposes that migration improves autonomy, human capital and self-esteem as well as women's authority and worth in their families and communities. Migration can change traditional norms as women have access to education and employment opportunities. It can improve and change gender norms at home, creating more gender equality when women are involved in earning an income for their families. It also brings in a change in their role to control over the household, acting as decision makers in

family choices and finance. Women take a responsible decision to achieve their desired outcome. Women migrants send remittance which is more stable and it has helped to improve family well-being in terms of health and better education for children-especially the girl child (Fluery, 2016).

### **Migration as Family Survival Strategy**

Migration in the recent times is mostly characterized as family and labour migration. Family migrants as it is understood involves men, women and children accompanying their parents. Women move along with their spouse to an urban city as she is more responsible for financially supporting her children. The state is authorised to protect migrant families as per the International Human Rights Law. Article 16(3) of the United Declaration of Human Rights states clearly that "the family is the natural and fundamental unit of the Society and is entitled to protection by the society and the State".

In a paper titled 'Migrant Labour and Gender Dimension,' the author focuses on the gender dimension of migrant labour from Maharashtra. Two types of migrant workers are examined - temporary (seasonal) and permanent to analyse the coping strategies and employment patterns of female migrants in the light of a changing socioeconomic order. The process of migration is viewed as a collective strategy adjusting the household unit to external changes in the productive system as cited by Wood (1981). The Committee on the 'Status of Women' has raised many questions relating to migrant women and a need for

detailed investigation of the impact of broken marriages, widowhood, desertion and abandonment of women on migration as it is assumed that affected women may be migrating in order to earn their livelihood. Similarly, social and cultural factors such as caste and region have important implications for decisions to migrate, or not to migrate and the consequences of migration for women especially in terms of their pattern of workplace participation in the city (Singh, 1978).

In another study, the author reviews the economic theories with evidence of migration, migration decision-making and brings out the importance of rural to urban migration as a deliberate household strategy adopted for poverty alleviation and risk mitigation. The migration process and remittances modernize the rural sector, both directly and indirectly through their impact on the production, increasing technological and institutional changes in the agricultural sector. Secondly, the migration process is a family risk management strategy. The family diversifies its income distribution to mitigate the risk confronted. It is evident from the village system that migration and remittances show that there exists a form of beneficial implicit-contractual arrangement between the migrant and the family, in terms of co-insurance for effective risk management (Lakshmanasamy, 1990).

Several studies that focus on women in the lower echelons of the informal sector unavoidably record that a majority of them have migrated from the rural areas. Access to urban services like schools,

hospitals, (PDS) public distribution system and secure housing is the least for the migrants. Studies have focused on the working conditions, quality of life, wage differentials and domestic life of the construction and brick kiln workers and gross non-adherence to legislation by contractors (Lakshmi Lingam, 1998).

In the International Migration Review, 2010, Hein De Haas, cited Ellis (1998) stating that migration as a livelihood strategy evolved in the 1970s and was of interest to geographers, anthropologist and sociologist conducting micro studies in developing countries, concluded that poor migrants are not passive victims of capitalist forces but actively improve their livelihood within the constraining conditions they live in. For the migrants, a livelihood strategy can thus be defined as a strategic or deliberate choice of a combination of activities by households and their individual members to maintain, secure, and improve their livelihoods. The choice of the migrants is selective, based on assets, perceptions of opportunities as well as aspirations which may differ from household to household and from individual to individual. Livelihood strategies thus tend to be heterogeneous (Hein De Haas, 2010).

A study on the migrant households in selected slums of Tamil Nadu in India is based on certain parameters to measure quality of life and it is observed that with regard to physical quality of life about two-third of the migrant households are very poor, they live in unhygienic and congested places devoid of basic necessities for a healthy life, like, housing, water supply, drainage and

sanitation. The most vulnerable are women and children as they are physically, mentally and economically affected. The rehabilitation measures undertaken by the TNSCB (Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board) is totally inadequate in relation to the increasing growth of slums. Hence in the study, an urgent call focuses on a comprehensive package of programmes incorporating the voice of the slum dwellers in the design, execution and implementation that needs to be launched in order to improve the quality of life of the migrant population besides safeguarding the urban environment (Sundari, 2007).

Contemporary Theoretical perspectives point out that families play an important role as decision-making units or institutions in which the choice to migrate is made by 'utilizing' the needs of its members for survival and development. As family is an agency which receives and manages remittances coming from family members working abroad it determines the impact on the economies of sending and receiving communities. Family can activate forms of cooperation and support, as well as processes of conflicting coercion and dynamics that may become causes or consequences of migration. Massey (1990), affirms that migration decisions are not made by individuals but rather by larger units of related people typically families or households (Laura Zafrini, 2012).

In an approach paper in National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR) the author, Santha Sinha talks about intervention in

monitoring the rights of migrant children with trafficking point of view. The hardships faced by families in the place of destination is miserable with children deprived of basic entitlement which adds to denial of health, nutrition, education, sanitation and hygiene results in children becoming more vulnerable to disease. Migrants' children are then forced to take up work in the unorganised sector and are victims of various forms of abuse. Children accompanying parents in the 0-14 years of age group may constitute about one-third of the total migrant population, while those in the elementary school age group (6-14), which is approximately 20 percent of nearly 6 million. The figures presented are conservative estimates and the reality may exceed it (Shantha Sinha, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Inter-state migration as one stream of internal migration from rural to urban areas and it is a process of development. It is a driver of growth and an important way out of poverty. Migration has significant positive impact on people's livelihood and well-being. The socio-demographic conditions of respondents are not as good as the majority of the respondents are young, married and illiterate. There is a split in family life with children left behind in the villages under the care of the relatives. The migrants in the construction sector work on an oral contract basis thus making their employment an insecure one. The women migrant workers are not paid their minimum wages and denied basic entitlement which denies the provisions towards health, nutrition, education,

housing and job security. Though their earning capacity in the city has improved compared to the situation in the villages they are not out of poverty as they are totally dependent on their native states to which they belong to, in other words the place of origin is very backward with no source of income.

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