

Public Arguments – 7



Tata Institute of Social Sciences
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Gender and Migration: A Postcolonial View

SAMITA SEN*

This *post-colonial view* is so named in the title because this paper seeks to engage with the scholarship on gender and migration in the colonial period, some of which is my own earlier work, and to chart some new and contemporary trends. It is only very recently that migration studies has considered the question of gender seriously and a body of work has emerged. Prior to this efflorescence, there were only rather fragmentary pieces of research on the subject. Moreover, much of the new work has tended to focus on the last two or three decades, prompted by increasing international migration by women to work in what is termed the global 'care' economy. In terms of single women's migration, there has been some by no means enough research on the causes and consequences of such migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This research has not been taken sufficiently into account in considering questions of migration in the contemporary period or in the more recent past. The term 'post-colonial' is meant to convey the critical importance of considering the question of migration, particularly women's migration, in terms of its continuities and discontinuities from the colonial period, and, equally critically, for our analyses to be informed by the insights of scholarship in that area. This essay is, therefore, an attempt to think gender and migration in a historical perspective and to see how and what changes mark contemporary trends.

There is also a more complex layer to the naming. The whole question of migration as it has been treated by scholars and policy-makers in South Asia remains inflected even today by a set of conflicting and contradictory colonial postulates. It is one of the conundrums of the nineteenth century that despite the massive mobilization of labour, much of it under the aegis of the colonial state, the state nevertheless clung to the orientalist stereotype of the Indian peasant as inherently immobile. On the one hand, there was an explicit preference for migrant labour over local labour in many emerging capitalist enterprises, such as the mills and factories of urban centres in Bombay and Calcutta, in the mines of the Chota Nagpur and, most dramatically, in the plantations in Assam and north Bengal; on the other, there were debates and controversies throughout the period on the desirability of large-scale migration, conditions of migration suitable for specific social categories such as peasants, women and adivasis, and concerns about the means of mobilization, particularly forms of internal intermediation based on kin, caste and community networks.

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Much of the heat in these debates was fuelled by the fact that neither the migration nor the labour contracts in the destination were either quite 'free' or favourable to workers. All these questions applied with additional force when it came to women especially since seclusion and segregation was thought to render women even more immobile than men in the South Asian context, and 'freedom' in the case of women was moot anyway.

The paper draws, as mentioned earlier, from some of my earlier work on the colonial period as well as from a project I supervised at the School of Women's Studies (2013 to 2015). The first section of the paper will draw on my historical research and the final section on the recent study, which focused on single women migrants from South 24 Parganas to Kolkata. Given that domestic work is the primary occupation of such migrants, the study focused on single migrant domestic workers. The method was qualitative, including semi-structured interviews. There were a total of 135 interviews of domestic workers, including 26 live-in, 31 day workers and 22 commuting workers, all single migrants from South 24-Parganas to Kolkata. We also interviewed a few women domestic worker migrants from South 24 Parganas, who came to Kolkata as part of a family group, including 14, who lived in family groups at the time of the interview and 25, who had been rendered 'single' after migration and headed their own households. In addition, there were 17 domestic workers working in Delhi interviewed, who were migrants from various districts of West Bengal. We also interviewed 25 sex workers in Kolkata, who were migrants, mostly from South 24 Parganas. The arguments in the final section of the paper are based mostly on these 160 interviews.¹

Gender and Migration: Trends in Colonial India

Migration was a key constituent in laboring arrangements desired by emerging capitalist enterprise in the nineteenth century. The 'needs of capitalism' argument—demonetized in academic currency in the last few decades is making a strong comeback in our struggles to understand contemporary social, economic and political change and must indeed be deployed to delve the significance of migration in the making of labour in the colonial period. In existing colonial historiography, three strands of migration have received considerable analytical attention, which have influenced our understanding of more recent and contemporary migration. There was, first, the migration of indentured labour to plantations, to Assam within India, but also to sugar and rubber plantations in Asia, Africa and the Caribbeans. Overseas migration began in the early nineteenth century, picked up momentum after

¹ This project was undertaken in collaboration with and funding from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Berlin, and coordinated by Nandita Dhawan and Ranjita Biswas for some of the time. I thank them and Srabasti Majumdar, Research Assistant, who contributed considerably to the discussion and analysis. There is considerable variation in these estimates. For a recent account, see Rana Behal's recent book on Assam tea workers (Behal 2016).

the abolition of slavery and remained significant until World War I. In the case of Assam, migration began later, in the 1870s, but continued until the 1930s. Given that such migration took place within the regulative mechanisms of the colonial state, it is amenable to counting. Between 1830 and 1930, by a rough estimation, about 4 million people migrated to work for plantations.² The mines especially coal and iron attracted some long-distance migration too, but they depended more on short-term migrants and commuting workers. The third major stream of migration was the vast rural-urban migration, which provided workers for expanding cities and towns including industrial workers, construction, transport, artisanal and service sector workers. The archetype of this migration has been developed from a rich vein of scholarship on the development of two major colonial cities, Bombay and Calcutta, and two of the most important industries centred round these cities, cotton and jute (Chandavarkar 1994; Sen 1999). There were many other kinds of migration as well, rural-rural, temporary, seasonal, inter-provincial and inter-district migration for agriculture and small-scale manufacturing and railways and other infrastructural projects (Anderson 2004).

In these various strands of migration, three common patterns may be discerned. The literature on colonial migration is dominated by the numerically significant rural-urban circular migration, in which the migrants were usually single men. One or more male members of rural families came to the city to work, sometimes for the best part of their working lives, leaving women, children, elderly members and some men too perhaps, behind in the village. There has been considerable discussion about the functional relationship between the rural and urban in such migrations. Earlier, scholars argued that debt and rural crises pushed such migration. Ranajit Dasgupta argued that colonial capitalism was subsidized by the sub-subsistence economic activities of women and children in the rural economy, which also took the entire burden of the reproduction of the urban workforce (Dasgupta 1987). The decisive intervention in this debate came from R.S. Chandavarkar in the early 1990s; he challenged views that perceived the rural and the urban as functional to each other either the rural as the buffer to the urban labour market or the urban as the supplement to deal with crisis in rural economy. He argued instead that poor households did not fit into analytic categories of rural and urban, industrial and agricultural, but devised strategies that encompassed both (Chandavarkar 1994). Arjan de Haan pointed out the need to examine who migrated and why, since even in acute crises, not everyone took to migration (de Haan 1994). Chandavarkar also pointed out that family migration was usually prompted by the exhaustion of rural resources. When whole families moved to the city,

² There is considerable variation in these estimates. For a recent account, see Rana Behal's recent book on Assam tea workers (Behal 2016).

little by way of economic link remained to tie them to the village, though familial and other connections may have persisted (Chandavarkar 1994). Such migrants were usually proletarianised. This kind of migration is seen in urban employment, plantation and mining. But family migration may also have led to peasantisation as in the case of colonization of new land in the context of Bengal, the migration to South 24 Parganas, the Sunderbans in particular, illustrates this atypical pattern. Some of the plantation migration also followed this pattern, since workers were sometimes settled on small pieces of land and required to supplement their wages with subsistence production.

In all these streams of migration, there was a significant presence of single women. It should be noted that in these descriptions, 'single' does not pertain to marital status. That is to say, single women or single men migrants are not equivalent to unmarried migrants—the reference here is to the process of migration and should perhaps be phrased differently for accuracy. We mean men and women who migrate singly, unaccompanied by other members of the family. The contrast is to family migration. In the case of women, such strategies of individual mobility are considered to be induced by social marginalization such as widowhood, desertion, and domestic violence (Sen 1999). In case of both men and women, such migration may in fact happen in groups several men of a family or caste group or village may migrate together, women may also migrate in small groups and on occasion may be accompanied by children. We refer to such migration as 'single' migration for the purpose of this study as indeed it is thus described in a great deal of migration literature to denote that such migration means a separation from the family. In the case of men, it usually means that the women and (some) children remain in the village and the men visit from time to time. The family straddles the village and the city; there are at least two households, one rural and one urban. Some of the men also married in the city and maintained two family-households, one in the city and one in the village.

For women, however, migration other than family migration usually meant severance or expulsion from family; such women broke their rural connection more decisively and were proletarianised. This kind of migration was seen in both rural-urban flows (including in sex work repeatedly noted from the nineteenth century) and, controversially, in indentured migration to plantations and short distance migration to mining settlements (Sen 2004).

These colonial typologies have been hugely influential in migration studies in India and continue to inform our understanding of migration patterns today. Empirically speaking, it is well established that all three of the above remain significant and perhaps describe the bulk of (certainly) internal migration in the country. There can be no doubt that single male rural-urban migration continues to be a crucial, perhaps the single most important, constituent of

employment migration even now. Though perhaps, as research indicates, the relative importance of family migration has been increasing.

Gender and Migration: Recent Trends

If the nineteenth century witnessed a spectacular spatial mobilization of labour, the late twentieth century was also a period of heightened migration. A dramatic change in global migration flows was documented from the early 1980s, one element of which is inter-Asian labour migration. From 1970s onwards, migration towards the other Asian countries has replaced older patterns of migration to the industrialized West. One of these new flows involves the migration of domestic workers from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to the Gulf countries. Leela Gulati notes that this change is of direction as well as gender women are now a significant proportion of migrants in occupations marked as exclusively female. These new flows of migration link with structures of particular occupations such as domestic work. This change is often conceptualized as a 'substitution effect' women replacing men in similar migration flows such as from Kerala to the Gulf and are supposedly demand-led. The scale of this gender substitution, with women sometimes outnumbering men, has come as a surprise to many (Gulati 2010). Nana Oishi terms this 'feminization' of migration given the high share of female migrants to total female population (Oishi 2002:2). The 'feminization of migration' is most evident in Asia, where hundreds of thousands of women migrate each year. In 2000, Asia witnessed 85 million female migrants compared to 90 million male migrants (Jolly et al 2003:6). In most countries, abject poverty at home, lack of work opportunities, very low wages and unstable political situations has made migration a significant survival strategy for both women and men. Moreover the changing pattern of migration is also linked to changing social norms that sanction new forms of mobility for women.

The causes and dynamics of this international migration are also echoed in internal migration in India, though we know much less about these changes or indeed whether or how much these are changes. Indian cities (like many others) are constituted by migration, primarily from rural hinterlands, that have been historically determined. For instance, colonial Calcutta attracted as much or even more labour from Bihar, UP, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh as from its own countryside. These flows changed dramatically from the 1970s, when inter-state immigration diminished in response to the city's commercial decline. However, the city still attracts labour migration from districts in West Bengal and some limited numbers from neighbouring states. In India over-all, urban population has increased by about 75 per cent as a result of migration (NSSO 64th Round). The increase in migration in the last few decades is considered to be driven by distress. Gadgil and Guha view migrants as 'ecological refugees' compelled to move by demographic pressure, declining

agricultural production, deforestation, water scarcity or soil erosion (Gadgil & Guha 1995). While poverty figures largest in explaining migration, its link with state policies is also a matter of discussion. In colonial and independent India, development practices have led to dispossessions, displacements, landlessness, unemployment and impoverishment, forcing people to move (Arya & Roy 2006:27). Most scholars have characterized labour migration as a forced livelihood response, arising from a complex set of social relations (including relations of debt and dependency) rather than simply subsistence failure. For others, however, migration provides a better opportunity to save, accumulate capital or invest in assets. Doubtless, migration is informed by livelihood and income comparisons between source and destination. Recent studies suggest the need to combine these factors in our understanding of migration. Thus, the agency of the migrant worker may be viewed as 'structurally embedded' (Moss et al, 2010).

The problem with demand-led hypotheses of migration lies in the deceleration in many urban economies Kolkata is not alone in this. Even in the preceding period, better-paid organized sector jobs were limited. During the period from 1962 to 1971, only 6.4 million additional jobs were created in the organized sector which meant that the over-whelming majority had to find a living outside the organized sector (Banerjee 1978: 5). The 1980s and 1990s witnessed further shrinkage. The closure of factories and mills intensified poverty in both rural and urban economies. In this period, new advances in technology reduced labour demand in large scale industry, creating instead more skilled jobs with education requirements, which excluded the rural poor. These changes in demand in the urban economy influenced rural-urban migration. The state, argues Jan Breman in an influential thesis, is complicit with the informalization of the urban economy (Roy 2003; Breman 1996). Thus the unorganized sector has become the only shelter for the toiling masses. How do the rural poor respond to serial failures in rural and urban economies? The solution is circularity a response that was developed in the colonial period, when both rural and urban economies suffered intermittent crises.

The influence of colonial literature has been particularly strong in migration studies, because we see the persistence or recrudescence of some crucial elements of colonial patterns of migration in the contemporary. The significance of circularity is at the centre of this comparison. The 'peasant-proletariat' discovered by the Indian Industrial Commission in 1918, appears to have become once again the mainstay of the labour market workers are able to access the informal economy of the city and also to retain their rural link. The centrality of the 'rural connection' in understanding labour and migration remains. At present, temporary migration is higher in India compared to the world average. A new development, flagged by Breman, is the precarity

characterizing vast swathes of the informal sector, including the urban. On the one hand, precarity dictates even more forcefully strategies that combine the rural and the urban; on the other, in a climate where precarious forms of livelihood dominate, the few forms of regular employment available are gaining importance (Bremner 1996). As in the case of international migration, the option of domestic work employment is driving a gender substitution in internal rural-urban migration.

There has been a dominance of structuralist arguments in explanations of circular migration as exemplified in the debates around the 'peasant-proletariat' of the colonial period. Among the many arguments around the 'rural connection' of the urban worker, one of the most important has been the sub-subsistence level of industrial wages, which required a subsidy from the unpaid labour of women and children in the village (Dasgupta 1987). From the 1950s, industrial wages have risen to levels approximating family wage, a formal sector has emerged on the basis of the exclusion of women and children from employment, with provision for social insurance and job security (Sen 2008). The process of formalisation, however, as scholars have shown, never covered more than ten per cent of the working population and since liberalization in the 1990s has been shrinking gradually but surely. This means that the majority of workers has remained in insecure and ill-paid jobs and continues to require some sort of subsidy, which in many cases is still provided by the rural economy. Thus, short term or circular migration remains a means of survival and a livelihood strategy of families, and they are also linked to accumulation regimes (CWDS 2012).

The reverse has also been true and continues to hold good. The essence of circular migration is that workers do not relocate to the city completely; they move between village and city. A single family-household has to straddle village and city to ensure survival or improve their situation. Which end is providing the subsidy? Increasingly, there is no clear answer. The agrarian crisis of the last two decades has been seen as the prime context for increasing migration; but the crisis has not led to unilinear rural-urban migration to the same extent as it has driven circular migration. Some forms of circular migration especially temporary and seasonal migration are strategies to bridge lean periods in the rural economy.

For poor households, especially those with relatively closer access to a city, there is no demarcation between the rural and the urban economies. Their survival strategies encompass the two. According to Priya Deshingkar, circular migration persists due to mutual cooperation and assurance between sending families and the migrants themselves (Deshingkar 2008). The rural areas do not offer access to capital or much needed cash, but it continues offer the shelter of a homestead when urban labour markets fail or when illness

and old age no longer allows the unremitting physical labour demanded in the low-paid and informal jobs in the city. Thus, the security of family home and patches of land remain important and a critical element in the persistence of circulation.

It is the renewed focus on circularity, which has helped to bring women into the framework of migration studies. This has happened because the focus is no longer exclusively on rural-urban or agriculture-industry movements. Scholars argued earlier too that in short-distance rural-rural labour migration women have always outnumbered men. Such deployment of women's labor is part of the household's survival strategy and women's seasonal migration neither revokes nor challenges family authority (Sen 2004). Rather, a pattern of periodic migration of women is integral to the labour strategy of small and marginal peasant families. Thus the dominant values of seclusion and segregation do not preclude poor women's participation in field and other visible work, even when it involves traveling long distances. The single migrant women, who participates in rural-urban circular migration, fits into this pattern and may even be considered an extension of it. There is an influx from villages to the cities; women are part of this stream of mobility, some of them accompany families, some may travel alone the dynamics are determined by a host of factors, including the relative employment possibilities of female and male members of the family. In case of women, the decision to migrate to the city is further prompted by the absence of remunerative work in the village. In land poor families, men's labour is better utilized in the agricultural economy. Neela Mukherjee writes: 'For every migrant woman, four others are waiting to migrate' (Mukherjee 2000: 2337).

As mentioned earlier, women's migration has once again increased in the twenty-first century, even though it registers as 'marriage migration' rather than labour migration. According to the 2001 census among 309.4 million migrants 218.7 were females and 90.7 millions males. Globalization, gender specific labour market, extreme poverty, mechanization of agriculture and environmental degradation has contributed in the increase in female migration in India. The Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, undertook a research in the period 2008 to 2011 to study the interlinkage between the agrarian crisis, women's vulnerabilities to migration and the resulting social inequalities in the period of economic liberalization. The study spread across the country and surveyed over three thousand women in twenty states. According to this report, the agrarian crisis came to the fore within a decade of the structural shifts in Indian governmental policy, which resulted in increase in non-agrarian growth and large scale suicides by farmers. The non-agrarian growth however did not create employment opportunities, thereby prompting distress migration. The report showed that almost a quarter (close

to 23 percent) of female migrant workers migrated alone; this indicates that autonomous migration by women is on the rise. This is further supported by the fact that about 7 percent of female migrants indicated that they migrated in all female groups. There is then a new development in women's migration for work (CWDS Report 2012: 63). As mentioned earlier, women's migration has once again increased in the twenty-first century, even though it registers as 'marriage migration' rather than labour migration. According to the 2001 census among 309.4 million migrants 218.7 were females and 90.7 millions males. Globalization, gender specific labour market, extreme poverty, mechanization of agriculture and environmental degradation has contributed in the increase in female migration in India. The Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, undertook a research in the period 2008 to 2011 to study the interlinkage between the agrarian crisis, women's vulnerabilities to migration and the resulting social inequalities in the period of economic liberalization. The study spread across the country and surveyed over three thousand women in twenty states. According to this report, the agrarian crisis came to the fore within a decade of the structural shifts in Indian governmental policy, which resulted in increase in non-agrarian growth and large scale suicides by farmers. The non-agrarian growth however did not create employment opportunities, thereby prompting distress migration. The report showed that almost a quarter (close to 23 percent) of female migrant workers migrated alone; this indicates that autonomous migration by women is on the rise. This is further supported by the fact that about 7 percent of female migrants indicated that they migrated in all female groups. There is then a new development in women's migration for work (CWDS Report 2012: 63). The Sixty-fourth round of the NSS included a special report on migration, which suggests that male migration has lagged behind female migration in the last decade, in both rural and urban economies. In rural areas, female migration rate (per 1000 females) was 477 while the male migration rate was 54, and in the urban areas, the male migration rate was 259 compared to female migration rate of 456 (NSSO, Migration in India 2007-2008).⁵

This study by NSS has been received with great enthusiasm by researchers because it has taken into account short term migrants as a separate category, even though it is beset by definitional problems. By and large, national data sets have tended to ignore circular, seasonal and short term migration to privilege permanent settlement, which overly values family migration and hinders gender analysis of migration patterns. Many economists are grappling with the feminization of migration. Sadhna Arya and Anupama Roy echo Oishi's thesis of the feminisation of migration for internal migration (Arya &

⁵ The data is based on last usual place of residence and also include those males and females who reported marriage as a reason for migration.

Roy, 2006:35), though it is difficult to date or track the numerical significance of this phenomenon in the absence of data.

Assuming that NSS is right and there has been a preponderance of female migration, how do we explain this phenomenon? Nirmala Banerjee argued that in inhospitable labour market conditions, when men cannot find jobs under conditions they are willing to accept, they deploy the labour of women (also girl children) in adverse or even abject conditions of employment (Banerjee, 1978: 6). Does this explain the influx of women migrants in domestic work employment? Is this why women are beginning to participate in temporary and circular rural-urban migration previously considered the exclusive preserve of men? This kind of migration decision is influenced by opportunities as well as constraints and, even if taken independently, is not devoid of familial and cultural concerns.

Our understanding of female migration has undergone major changes in the last few decades. Many scholars have pointed out that women should not be labeled only as associational migrants, either accompanying their husbands because of marriage or participating in family migration in response to higher male earnings. These single women move either as a supporting housekeeper or as a supporting co-earner. Neetha makes two arguments against locating single women migrants within the rubric of household strategies. First, conceptualizing women as associational migrants betrays a male bias; female migration becomes subservient to male migration and familial decisions. Second, viewing female migration as secondary and, therefore, with very little socio-economic impact on the place of origin or place of destination tends to reflect the general stereotype of women's labour as unproductive and insignificant (Neetha 2004: 1681). According to Agrawal, the conformist image of women as firmly situated within the household domain is challenged by those engaging in paid wage work outside the home, and even more so by those moving away from family or community to seek work (Agrawal, 2010:24). Thus, studies on 'single women migration' women migrating unaccompanied by men or not migrating as associational migrants or not as a part of family add a whole new dimension to our understanding of migration.

In the contemporary period, women's migration includes all the earlier kinds of migration, i.e., women migrating with families to cities from villages, both as permanent and circular migrants; deserted wives and widows who migrate alone or with children, who tend to be permanent migrants but are also occasionally circular migrants; women also continue to be present as individuals, with families or in all-female groups in short-term circular migrants in both rural-rural and rural-urban as well as urban-rural streams. In the next section, however, we highlight a pattern of women's migration that is new in migration literature. There is now a gender shift in the pattern

of migration previously considered peculiarly male; we see the existence of married women who are single migrants, leaving behind family in the village and returning to it from time to time.

Single Women Migrants and Women Single Migrants: Continuity and Change

We saw a glimmer of a pattern of single women's migration that is not outside the family context in 2006-2009, when we were working on a research project on domestic workers in a neighbourhood in south Kolkata. We argued that this kind of migration, while not unique to domestic work, is nevertheless most prevalent in this and some related occupations (Sen and Sengupta 2016). A new research was undertaken in 2013-15 to follow up on these preliminary findings. From the 160 interviews taken as part of this research (as detailed above), some new trends in women's migration became evident. The research focused primarily on domestic workers (and a small number of interviews were taken of sex workers), thus there is little scope to compare migration patterns in different occupations.

From the interviews, we found two subsets to single women's migration. First, there are young single women migrants, girl children of ages as low as 5 years, but more commonly between ages 7 to 14 years, who are single rural-urban migrants doing live-in domestic work in the city. Ishita and Deepita Chakravarty's work indicates the incidence of this is very high, especially in West Bengal (Chakravarty and Chakravarty 2016). Second, we also see adult single women migrants of whom only some follow the older pattern of being rendered mobile by social marginalization. An equally important numerical segment seems to be analogous to the single male migrants as described above. That is to say, adult women in subsistent marriages (in a few cases, adult daughters) who come to the city to work as live-in or (accompanied by one or more of their children) as day workers. They leave husbands and (some) children behind in the village, visit regularly and their remittance is crucial to the subsistence of the rural household. Many women maintain such arrangements for long periods of their lives. Interestingly, this pattern of migration has been noted and studied much more in the context of international migration of nurses and domestic workers. We need similar enquiry for internal migration.

We can claim these to be 'new' in that they have not been included in migration studies, but we cannot argue that these are new phenomenon, precisely for the same reason. My work on migration in the colonial period has so far not yielded any material on which I can provide any definite chronology though, of course, some of that older work has great bearing on these patterns within general questions of women's migration.

A gendered analysis of labour migration cannot rely on existing national data: first, because it invariably underestimates women's labour migration; and second, because the definitional shifts allow no temporal pattern to emerge. The colonial stereotypes have persisted in the gendering of migration well after even the most casual observation indicates that they have changed quite drastically. Migrants can no longer be fit into the old boxes single male labour migrant, female marriage migrant or permanent family migration. We find single women migrants who follow the earlier pattern of migrating to the city by reason of widowhood or social marginalization or because they are forced out of village society for transgression of gender/sexual norms, women for whom marriage and employment are linked reasons for migration, and families who allocate for young girls and married mothers the circular pattern of migration earlier believed to be the preserve of single male migrants. If we begin to look at women's migration from this new perspective, we see a great deal more of women's migration than indicated by conventional data. To explore these questions further we need more qualitative studies to try and capture the cross and flows of movements, complex and multiple motivations as revealed in the migration histories of individual women.

These connections are many and varied. The study conducted by Seema Joshi (in a slum area in Delhi) focused on the interconnection between migration and domestic work. She argues that on the supply side, there is neither any barrier to enter into this segment of the informal sector nor is there any formal skill requirement (Joshi 2004). Thus, the relative ease and certainty of finding domestic work employment enables migration of women but also of families. The CWDS meso-level study too has identified the single woman migrant as a new finding in their report and this study has helped us in pursuing the connections between such migration and domestic work (CWDS 2012).

Our study has been qualitative, the numbers being insignificant for any discussion of trends. In the case of domestic work, however, numbers have proved difficult to establish. A number of studies have spoken of an expansion in domestic work employment in the past few decades. Estimates vary considerably. An oft-quoted figure is 2.52 million by the NSSO (2009-10), 4.2 million is the figure quoted by the ILO, NGO sources have claimed 7 million. According to the NSSO data, 75 per cent domestic workers are urban and 57 per cent are women. One recent estimate suggests that 23 per cent of women workers in West Bengal are domestic workers (Chakravarty and Chakravarty 2016). Various studies are showing that for poor urban women, domestic work is an increasingly significant occupation. Our study focuses on the significance of domestic work in influencing migration. This interlinkage of domestic work and migration works in two ways. The evidence points first to the relative ease of access to domestic work as a major influence on migration decisions of the

household, allowing women to undertake what might otherwise have been risky migration decisions and second, that migration is a key constituent in the structure of the urban domestic workers market influences wages and working conditions in this sector.

There can be no doubt that wage labour for migrant women is highly exploitative and cannot be romanticized as freedom, but migration has different implications for women's lives compared to men's. Indeed, the desire of freedom from family and community often prompted such migration (Sen 2004). While women were mobile for various purposes in the nineteenth century, there was an attempt to render them less mobile in early twentieth with their exclusion from many sectors in which they had found employment. They were excluded from mills and mines. The only industry in which they retained their share was in the plantations. In this period, women were concentrated in a narrow range of jobs in the urban economy. We see their increasing presence in domestic work from the 1930s and the sex industry remained a staple employer. Nirmala Banerjee noted a shift in the 1970s and 80s, when there was noticeable increase in women's non-agricultural employment in the rural sector and in some export-oriented industries (Banerjee 1991). These opportunities were availed by new categories of women, who were for the first time entering, in some significant numbers, the manufacturing labour force. This seemed to be the case also in some traditional industries, such as textiles and embroidery as well as some 'modern' industries, such as gem-cutting in Tamil Nadu (Sen 2008). Parents began delaying marriage of daughters and accepting their employment even when it involved long daily commuting or long-distance migration. Though a highly restricted phenomenon, a beginning was made in the creation of a labour pool of unmarried young women.

The interviews show multiple trajectories of migration in the lives of individual women. Indeed, taken together, we find a somewhat bewildering range of movements from this research. We are provisionally calling this hypermobility, even though such a label presumes a 'normal' level of mobility, which is difficult to argue. The notion of hypermobility is deployed to signal different kinds of mobility undertaken by an individual at different stages in their lives. Many individual migration histories show that they have been at some point a participant in family migration, which may consist of a whole household or a fragment thereof. Many women interviewed have experienced single migration, a large majority as child domestic workers. Moreover, patterns of migration include multiple spatial relationships, such as rural-rural, rural-urban and urban-rural. Moreover, there is employment migration, marriage migration and/or associational migration.

Of the many patterns that can be identified, seven stand out as numerically preponderant. First and perhaps the most common is that of young girls under

fourteen, who travel from village to city, usually as live-in domestic workers. Many of these girls, when they are a little older, return to the village for marriage, providing a second template. Thus, many new brides have already travelled twice between village and city. In a third variation, girls are brought back after a few years in domestic service, not immediately for marriage but kept at home for a period before marriage. This may be because the income from her work is no longer required or because families are less sanguine about older girls working outside the home. In our 160 interviews, we have found high levels of marriage migration (expectedly, since migration literature emphasizes women's marriage migration in northern India) and in all possible directions, rural-rural, rural-urban and urban-rural. However, unexpectedly, we found on occasion marriage migration closely entangled with employment.

Apart from the three patterns discussed above, there is the classic single women's migration, which continues to be of continuing numerical significance. There are adult women, who are widows or deserted wives, at times with some or all children, who come to the city from the village in search of work. Such women may remain in the city for most of their lives. In a few cases, however, they may be able to accrue resources in the village (usually land, homestead and cattle) which enable them to return to the village. This may be by inheritance, which we found in a small number of cases. In most cases, women build these resources from their own income.

The last three patterns pertain to the 'new' pattern of migration discussed earlier. These are adult married women, who come from the village for, usually, live-in domestic work in the city. Occasionally, we find these women living in the city's tenements with other family members, female kin or one or two children, and undertaking day work. This is the pattern analogous to the single male migration so well-known in colonial labour history. These women also undertook reverse migration, which meant in effect that they gave up their jobs and returned to the village. In most cases, this signaled retirement, enabled by children's earnings, usually a son's. In a few cases, daughters were inducted into similar work situations. Thus, mother and unmarried daughter(s) might work in separate middle class homes as live-in workers in the same or even different cities. In a few cases, we have found that a woman, who comes to the city as part of a family remains behind after the husband/father returns to village. This is a paradoxical outcome: A woman is rendered single in the process of family migration.

We cannot exemplify all these patterns; let us illustrate a few of these trajectories, through four life histories in very brief sketch. The names have been changed. Sabita was 37 years old when we interviewed her. She worked as a live-in domestic worker in Kolkata. When she was young, she did not get along with her mother, so she came to Calcutta with a relative at the age of

about 10 years and began to work as a live-in. She got a job in Chandannagar looking after a young child. The mistress was very harsh and bit (not beat) her so badly one day that she had to be hospitalized for two weeks. She was taken to the hospital by an older woman of the locality and then brought to her live with some of the woman's relatives. They did not give her proper food, just boiled vegetable peels. Her hair was cut off. Realising that she was being ill-treated, the woman took her to a house in Howrah to work, where she was given only boiled rice and potato to eat, without salt. She was then moved to another house to work, where she was reasonably comfortable. Later, she found a job as a cook and she got involved in a romantic relationship. She married, but the marriage failed. She started to work in Howrah again when she got an opportunity for better earnings in a job in Delhi. This was a short stint and she returned to work in Kolkata.

Parul Gharami was 46 years at the time of the interview. She had been a day worker for twenty years after her marriage and had started in live-in work only seven months before the interview. Her husband was asthmatic and unable to work, so she earned for the family. He did a little agricultural work in the village. She proposed that he stay in the village and look after the children, while she worked in Kolkata. Her husband agreed. She commuted for twenty years, but found this more difficult as she grew older, so she took a live-in job.

Kalpana Purakait looked after her husband, father-in-law, one son and one daughter. Her husband was ill and could not earn enough. When she tried to take the children out of school, the teachers said that she must try to educate them. She was finding it difficult even to feed the children. So, she moved to Kolkata to try and earn more. The children were at the time of the interview in classes VI and VII. Her husband worked intermittently as an agricultural labourer, looked after the household and the children. She found work as a live-in domestic worker and was able to send money regularly. She is a bit guilty about not having the children with her, but pragmatic about what she had to do.

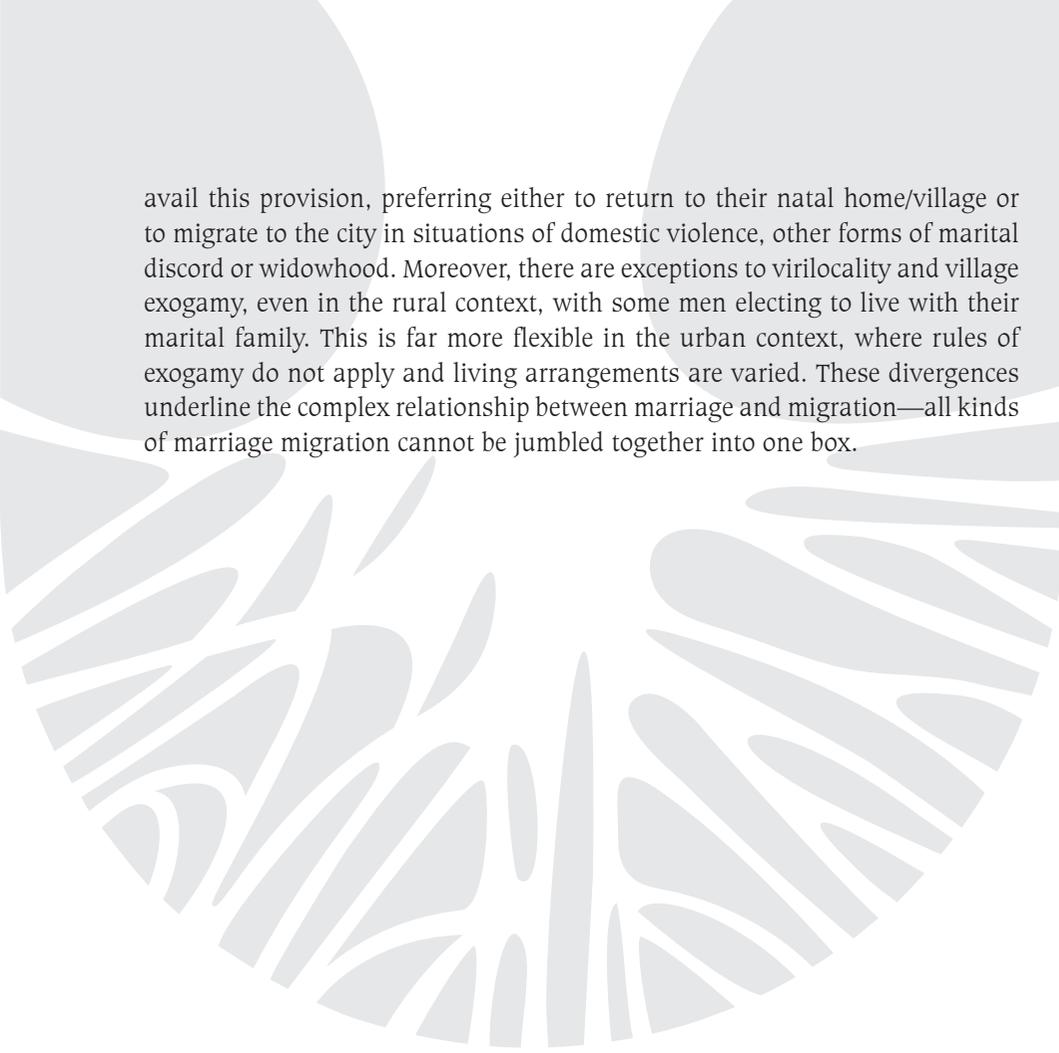
Taru Bhattacharya was exactly the same age as Kalpana. Both were 30 years at the time of the interview. Taru, moreover, was one of three Brahmin women we interviewed and the only woman who had remained unmarried for so long. She had two brothers. Her father, who worked for the PWD, died early. Taru stayed with her mother and an unmarried elder brother. The eldest brother lived separately and worked in the railways. Earlier, when they lived in Calcutta, she used to work in a school. Then they had to give up the quarters given to them because of her father's job and the family moved to Amtala. She worked as a domestic worker but through an agency.

This study of migration of women domestic workers is placed in the

context of the contradictory logic of gender and mobility bequeathed to us by the curious paradoxes of colonialism. All migration studies acknowledges that in India, women have always been the largest group of migrants, the share has held more or less at a steady rate of about seventy per cent since counting began. This is marriage migration, however, and to be studied as custom of village exogamy in the north Indian marriage system. By contrast, migration studies focus on employment and does not concerned itself with marriage migration.

Recent research is trying to break these sharp divisions, such as between marriage and employment in migration studies to suggest that the two are at times closely implicated. To begin with, marriage migration is also single women's migration. It is not usual to think of it thus. The custom of village exogamy is explained as a patriarchal instrument to isolate young women from their natal kin to enable greater control over them. Such strategies are not, however, devoid of the logistics of labour. In this respect it may be useful to reflect on another conundrum: Why are women who are otherwise considered (or even rendered) immobile, compulsorily migrants at marriage? It is usually imagined that marriage migration is primarily rural-rural or at best rural-urban. But the most interesting finding of this research is the quite significant presence of urban-rural marriage migration. Young girls, who migrate to the city to work prior to marriage, often migrate back to the village for marriage and have to fall back upon sporadic and poorly remunerated work in the village. Their re-incorporation into the rural economy is quite often unsustainable unless the marital family is sufficiently well-off to be able to maintain non-earning wives and this seems to be getting more and more difficult. The deepening agrarian crisis has undoubtedly a major role to play in this context. Most women, who have to earn to supplement the marital family's livelihood, find it impossible to do so from resources available in the village. Many of these women then migrate back to the city; if they are close enough to the city, they may commute daily; many are forced to move to the city (alone or with a part of the family). Of these women, some may return to the village at the end of their working lives, some may not. For these women, the trajectory of migration is rural-urban-rural-urban-(occasionally) rural.

Equally, migration remains, as in the colonial period, an exit strategy from marriage (Sen QC) With dwindling economic opportunities in the village, women who wish to exit marriages have very few options. The combination of virilocality and village exogamy renders it virtually impossible for wives to remain in their marital village outside their marital home. The low returns of labour in the village economy reinforce the problem. In this context, it may be interesting to reflect on the right to residence provided in the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Very few women seem willing or able to



avail this provision, preferring either to return to their natal home/village or to migrate to the city in situations of domestic violence, other forms of marital discord or widowhood. Moreover, there are exceptions to virilocality and village exogamy, even in the rural context, with some men electing to live with their marital family. This is far more flexible in the urban context, where rules of exogamy do not apply and living arrangements are varied. These divergences underline the complex relationship between marriage and migration—all kinds of marriage migration cannot be jumbled together into one box.

Conclusion

The question of migrant domestic workers has received considerable scholarly and policy attention in recent decades but mostly in the context of international migration. This paper has drawn attention to the very significant phenomenon of migrant domestic workers within India. Even though the numbers involved are difficult to establish, there can be no doubt that the label describes millions of workers. This numerically large labour segment has attracted little or no policy attention and even research on the subject has been quite fragmentary. Our qualitative study was focused on small numbers but yielded rich material on the complexity of the interlinkages between domestic work and patterns of migration as well as the multiple trajectories of migration that complicate questions of gender and migration.

The paper has additionally sought to place women's migration in a longer historical trajectory. It draws on my own previous work to show that in the contemporary we find patterns of women's migration not noticed in the colonial period. Instead, a pattern of migration considered exclusively male in the colonial period is now noticeable among women, particularly among women domestic workers. Thus, the paper shows the variations within a descriptive label such as 'single women migration'. Such migration can be broken down into the migration of 'single women'—an older pattern of the migration of women widowed or otherwise marginalized in the household or the rural economy. Such single women migrants were usually dis-embedded from the rural family. These women were proletarianised in the sense that they lost access to rural resources, which were contingent upon familial role fulfillment. The other category of women migrants is women migrating singly (who are not single women). These are similar to male migrants, who have been the focus of much of the literature on migration. The implications of such changes in the gendering of migration is as yet imperfectly understood but it does suggest the need for a serious reconsideration of the links between marriage and employment migration, which has received little attention in migration literature so far.

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A large, stylized tree graphic in a dark green color dominates the middle of the page. The tree has a thick, rounded trunk and a wide, spreading canopy of branches. The branches are thick and curved, creating a dense, organic shape. The background is a solid dark green, and the tree is rendered in a lighter shade of green, creating a high-contrast, graphic effect.

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