

Female Migration in India: Myths and Realities

Sandhya Rani Mahapatro¹

Extended Abstract:

Feminization of migration in India suggests female outnumbered their male counterparts. According to 2001 Census of 309 million migrants based on place of last residence, female migration constitutes 218 million which is 91 million for male. Thus migrants constitute around 30 percent of the total population, male and female migrants constituting 18 percent and 45 percent of their population respectively. The growth rate of female migration is higher than male migration reflected through the increasing female-male ratio. Not only in magnitude but also from the perspective of development internal migration female is an important factor influencing socio-economic development of the country as it has greater potential for poverty reduction, bringing social change and an important factor to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Despite the significance and their growing proportion, female migration is largely under-represented in migration studies. The neglect of research on women's migration is attributed to number of circumstances including the emphasis placed in existing economic theories of migration where migration is seen as motivated by economic opportunity; male migration for economic reasons and female migration largely driven by social and family-related reasons rather than economic motivation. Several researchers have concluded that migration of females is largely caused by marriage or as dependent (Bose, 1973; Premi, 1979; Nangia.et.al, 1990; Rele, 1969). Such gender bias in the migration pattern are often explained in the context of India's historical, institutional and socio-cultural norms that stereotype women as playing economic and social roles secondary to those of man. Due to this male-centric conceptualisation, the various dynamics of female migration remain unexplored.

¹ Research Scholar, (Population Research Center), Institute for Social and Economic Change ,
Bangalore, India
sandhyamahapatro@gmail.com

However, recent case studies though few, have disclosed some of the socio-economic aspect of female migration. Studies by (Pandey, 1998; Shanti, 1993; Sundari, 2004; Sardamoni, 1995) that a significant proportion of female migration in India takes place for economic reasons. There is an indication of increasing numbers of young women joining the migration flow to cities, many of them going on their own to find work in service, manufacturing and informal sector (Sundari, et.al.1998; shanty,1993). It seems pattern of migration of female shifted from associational to autonomous migration, from marriage related reasons to economic reasons. Migration of female for economic reasons should greatly explain in the push-pull framework. On one hand the increasing demand for female labour due to the gendered labour market combined with declining opportunities in rural area, has led to migration of female (both autonomous and associational) seeking employment. However, the new macro economic processes function differently upon different categories of women, depending upon their class². Hence, migration of women may be owing to economic, marital, upward social mobility or associational reason.

With the passage of time, like transition occurring in the society, the needs and behaviour, the role and responsibility of female in the household also getting changed. The macro level changes affect a lot at micro level. For instance, the gender role and relations within the household become changed. Earlier families are more likely to move in support of men's career and women are more likely to be 'trailing spouse' or tied movers. But now families are migrated in response to female economic opportunity (Premi 2001, Meher 1994, Shanthi..1993). Instead of male selective migration the increasing trend suggests family migration where women also play a significant role. Hence, one should not do fair if the migration of female restricted only to the traditional concepts of marriage migration and tied movers. There is a need to have a specific analysis of different aspects of female migration, so that one can understand how the socio-economic factors responsible for changing migration behaviour of female.

Objectives:

1. To study the economic oriented female migration in the context of changing pattern.

² Poor marginalized women are compelled to join informal sector for survival of the family. For middle class women, finding employment in the formal sector become must to maintain a minimum 'middle class standard of living. The upper middle class women, too is drawn in to the labour market by an inner urge to do something creative and prove her worth (Vinita singh, 2007)

2. To understand the autonomous movement of female and role of female in family migration in relation to female economic opportunities.

Data and Methodology

Data source: For the purpose of the study, Census of India and National Sample Survey data is used. These two sources of data provide information on emerging pattern of migration in India.

Methodology:

Method: This study is based on quantitative secondary data. The whole analysis of the study is carried out using simple statistical techniques like rates, ratio and percentage etc.

Period of the study: The study is analysed for the period 1971-2001 using Census. NSS 55th round data which is also used refer to the period 1999-2000.

Indicators: It is not possible to estimate the autonomous female migration from Census data and even in NSS directly. Hence, using some indirect indicators like household size, relation to household head, 'never married' female here we try to measure the extent of autonomous female migration.

Findings of the study:

There is feminisation of internal migration in India as females outnumber man in several categories. The findings of the study also suggest that large number of female migration takes place for survival reason. The steady increase in labour force participation of female after migration corroborates the above statement. The economic orientation behind migration of female reflected through increasing R-U migration over the period, higher work participation rate of migrants compared to non-migrants and increase in labour force participation rate after migration. The pitiless changes taking place in rural area and the opening up of gender segregated labour market in urban areas have induced female migration(single and family) which is largely for economic reason.