

**GENDER, MIGRATION AND IDENTITY:
MALAYALI WOMEN IN PUNE CITY**

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Conclusion

Introduction

In this research I had studied the life experiences of women who had undertaken internal migration for skilled labour in postcolonial India. I have focused on the determinants of women's migration for work in the public sector and post-migration experiences of work, family, community and city to understand the combination of enabling factors for female labour migration and the constraints in the life cycle of working women. The data was collected using qualitative methods involving in-depth interviews, participant observation and archival research. In the case of India, labour force participation rate began to decline visibly from the 1980s onwards among literate as well as illiterate sections of the female population (Abraham, 2013; Bhagat, 2017). A study of the periods prior to the arrival of corporate capital from the mid 1980s in India becomes critical to establishing a background to contemporary issues related to decline in female work force participation.

The current research brings into focus the lived realities of women who were part of the urban labour force in India in early postcolonial India. The life narratives trace back to the time period from when there began a decline/stagnation in female labour force participation or the share of women in the labour force (Abraham 2013). By studying the critical stages in the lives of migrant women who remained in the urban labour force during this period, the research also looks into the possible reasons for the gradual withdrawal of educated women, belonging to middle class and upper caste households, from formal labour markets in India.

In the early years following Independence, before the peak of Gulf migration in the late 1970s, internal migration to other cities and regions in India for employment was a common feature among certain communities in Kerala, especially those who were the largest beneficiaries of higher education and had dispersed lineages in urban areas. By 1961, migration to other regions such as Pune, which was rapidly urbanizing and industrializing and required labour (Diddee, 1984), had emerged as a solution to Kerala's growing number of "educated unemployed" (Joseph, 2000). Educated women from Kerala also migrated during this period in search of work, mainly as nurses, teachers and in secretarial and clerical positions. However, neither the higher

education of young girls nor their desire to seek out employment was a smooth process.

The notions surrounding female education and employment was situated in an ambiguous space that questioned the purpose of female higher education and employment while also assigning an inferior status to women's involvement in domestic labour and allied activities (Abraham, 2013). Nevertheless, due to various factors Malayali women seeking employment opportunities were significant and they showed an inclination to move to other parts of the country and abroad as single or "spinster" migrants as noted in Singh (1985). Clearly, education was an encouraging factor however it was not the only factor that allowed women to migrate in search of employment. The social network of south Indian immigrants in the Defence establishments in Pune, which had a historical presence, had become influential post Independence due to its contact resources (Lin, 1999, p. 36). This network, for instance, proved to be instrumental in the job searches of new Malayali female migrants to the city.

Main Findings

My thesis shows that from the late 1960s up until the early 1980s educated women from privileged caste-class backgrounds in Kerala actively sort out work in clerical, besides secretarial, teaching and nursing, professions by undertaking interstate migration before their marriage. The combination of factors that facilitated their migration and employment included an influential social network, requirements of unpaid care work, regional particularities such as spread of literacy, and the ensuing educational attainment among women, the feminine nature of labour markets, and skilled training of women in those areas.

The study reveals that neither the higher education of young girls nor their desire to seek out employment was a smooth process. The notions surrounding female education and employment were situated in an ambiguous space that questioned the purpose of women's higher education and employment while also assigning an inferior status to their involvement in domestic and other allied activities, and in child rearing. Nevertheless, women seeking employment opportunities from Kerala were high (Singh, 1985; Joseph, 2000) and they also showed an inclination to move to other parts of the country and abroad as single (or yet to be married) migrants in

search of employment.

Gendered experiences of internal migration reveal certain enabling and constraining factors for female labour migration in skilled professions based on regional and ethnic histories, and middle class and upper caste identities. During the period under study, a combination of factors facilitated the migration and employment of single and educated Malayali women in Pune. These include the presence of an influential, caste-based migration network of Malayalis in Pune; the female migrant's desire to supplement familial income and enable social mobility; their status as single and educated women at the time of migration; and the requirements of unpaid familial labour. The enabling factors for their migration to Pune were situated in the gendered notions of care work and in certain caste/class understanding of working women within emerging notions of Kerala modernity.

Although they did not have any regrets with respect to their work in the later years of their lives when the interviews were taken, their desire to remain in the workforce was a continuous struggle as migrants and to re-imagine the boundaries of social acceptance for working women and to match the gendered expectations of a familial woman and the communal expectations of a skilled migrant worker.

Women had to constantly negotiate with patriarchal structures to access white-collar jobs and retain themselves in the workforce. These struggles were multifold and involved 'the inevitable horizon' of marriage, familial responsibilities, limited resources of an emerging city, and gendered ideologies that reduced the opportunities for women following migration. Most of my respondents also belonged to a conformist generation. However, the way they strived to search for work when they were unmarried show that they were aware of the limitations that marriage and the ensuing double burden – due to the gendered division of domestic and care work – have on their participation and extent of involvement in the labour force.

Post migration and in their later years, the lives of upper caste and middle class women continued to be regulated/influenced by the world of domesticity into their old age even though they had engaged outside 'the realm of the private' as working women. For these women the alternative spaces, including office environment and public spaces of daily commute, were central in the formation of their identities and for building friendships. However, their engagement in these alternative spaces

reduced as they left the formal workforce.

Conceptual Framework

My research proposes an alternative conceptual framework that incorporates the concepts of ‘saving’ and ‘smart femininity’ to examine the interstate migration of women for labour in early postcolonial India. The three main concepts that run through the thesis are: *Rakshapadutuka* (saving), *midduki penne* (smart femininity) and *kuttabodham* (guilt). These concepts are tied together in succession in the life course of the working women.

Firstly, the concept of saving that helped strengthen bonds across class and mainly kin relations helped women especially from economically poorer families to find jobs after migration. Secondly, the notions of the smart, brilliant girl became the ideal based on which they functioned as they sort work immediately after studies in a sense to prove to themselves and others that they were worthy of being the ideal women. Being a single (or to be married) and educated woman from certain regional, caste and/or religious background involved in internal migration is central to this concept of smart femininity. Here, the ‘single’ migrant women are those who were unmarried at the time of their migration from Kerala to Pune during the period under study.

Thirdly, guilt was a major emotion older immigrant women, who had been employed, express especially with respect to their children. In the absence of communal or kin support, the children of some of the working women often assumed adult responsibilities early on. The older children took care of their younger siblings (Roberts 1984). The parents particularly the immigrant mothers felt that they paid less attention to their children during their growing up years due to hectic schedule and the women expressed a feeling of guilt and compensated for this by empathizing with their working children by taking care of their grandchildren in the later years of their lives. Due to the concept of guilt and structural limitations enforced through socio-cultural expectations of gendered roles, the women continued to function within the world of domesticity even when their identities conflicted with their enacted roles as clearly expressed by Remeny Venugopal and Mary George. In the absence of an alternative, developed realm in the public outside the world of domesticity and socially sanctioned religious participation, the women continued to remain ambiguous in the performance of their identities.

In chapter one titled “Determinants of female labour migration: Education, urbanisation, & other dimensions” I have attempted a macro-level study using existing literature to examine certain aspects of the milieu in which internal labour migration from Kerala became significant in order to locate the socio-cultural context within which educated and single women migrated to find employment in Pune and which shaped their lives thereafter. My intention was to focus on regional particularities that led to the trend of out-migration and emigration, and urbanisation and industrialisation of Pune that attracted internal migrants.

Through this chapter I have shown that educational and other welfare reforms in Travancore and Cochin regions from the late 19th century onwards led to a ‘remarkable’ progress in literacy and higher education in the state of Kerala post Independence. The nature of educational expansion among the masses in Kerala enabled lesser privileged sections of the society including women from lower castes and classes to benefit from educational reforms in the state. One of the best expectations from higher education was employment in clerical positions which many communities also aspired towards and was associated with caste privilege or status and respectability. However, the upper castes and middle classes who comprised the local elites remained the largest beneficiaries of higher levels of education and therefore were more likely to be recruited into government services. Women from various Christian denominations also benefitted from the influence of Christian missionaries and their initiative in establishing educational institutions in the state. However, women were largely trained in those professions, such as nursing, teaching and secretarial jobs, that suited the gendered nature of labour markets.

In spite of the progress made in female education in these decades, both the higher education and the work done by women were socially scrutinized and measured along the lines of utility with respect to women’s roles as mothers and wives. This resulted in women from middle class families bargaining for access to higher education and employment by committing to equally prioritize their ‘primary’ responsibilities as care givers and housekeepers. Hence, access to higher education and employment for middle class and upper caste women in Kerala transpired along with the internalization and acceptance of the responsibilities of double burden. Therefore, “women’s educational attainment” and employment in Kerala emerged within “entrenched patriarchal social structures” notably “the family” (Jeffrey & Basu, 1994;

Heward & Bunwaree, 1999 as cited in Kodoth & Eapen 2005, p. 3278).

Due to slow rate of industrial and agricultural productivity in Kerala 'unemployment' rates in the state was "severe" in the 1970s and 1980s (George 2005, p, 51). These periods were decades of intense migration from Kerala. Young people including women began to look for "educational and employment opportunities" in urban areas in India and through international migration (George, 2005, p. 52). Zachariah and Rajan (2015) observed that Hindus and Christians from Kerala were "well represented" (2015, p. 12) in internal migration as they had largely benefitted from higher levels of education in the state and could draw support from dispersed lineages across India (Gallo, 2017), while Malayali Muslims were the pioneers in emigration to the Middle East due to the strengthen of their social networks in these countries.

In this review, I argued that Malayalis began migrating to major cities across India that were developing at a faster rate and where there were opportunities for employment. During this period diversion of development from Mumbai encouraged the urbanisation and industrialization of Pune and increased the demand for labour. Additionally, Pune was an established military centre with the headquarters of the Southern Command and prominent cantonments. The expansion of military activities during this period also led to the rise in employment opportunities in the region. The development of railways and roads along Mumbai-Pune axial region gave accessibility to the region, which increased intrastate and interstate migration to the city from other regions including Kerala.

In this review, I have also explained other features and determinants for female labour migration and work force participation apart from educational attainment and labour demands that accompanied urbanisation and industrialization. Poverty induced by structural changes and other factors can lead to various forms of migration to informal sectors. Individual-level migration is also understood as a form of family-level strategy for economic mobility. The nature of the labour market at the destination, and women's marital status and age at the time of migration can regulate their participation as paid workers. Additionally, marriage migration of women can also be a form of labour migration.

With respect to these determinants, certain studies such as Kodoth and Eapen (2004), Abraham (2013), and Bhagat (2017) have noted various reasons for the decline in

educated women's work force participation. One reason is that the education of girls in India is calibrated towards internalizing modern patriarchal norms and this has likely led to an orientation towards the demands of female domesticity. Another factor is that with increasing household income, women are replacing paid work with domestic status production activities including engagement in progressive motherhood (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1990) often to reduce double burden and avoid the social stigma attached to women's employment.

All these factors and determinants have been explored in detail in decades of research in gender and migration studies. The "geographical study of migration" has benefitted enormously from critical perspectives introduced and promoted by the "feminist conceptualization of gender" (Nawyn, 2010, p. 759). From analyzing and interpreting gender as "a simple binary variable" that measure "sex category" to working with complex "gendered structures" and processes that determine the mobility and outcome for women and men (Nawyn, 2010, p.760), migration studies have come a long way. Due to the use of "feminist analytic lens, feminist methods, or feminist epistemologies" these studies have established the field of feminist migration research (Nawyn, 2010, p. 749-750). However, as Nawyn (2010) argues feminist migration research is yet to be completely integrated into the broader field of mainstream migration research.

In chapter two, "Historical emergence of social networks & shared identities in immigrant communities", I have traced the historical formation of migration network of Malayalis connected to the Defence establishments in Pune and located certain characteristics of the Malayali migrant community from which emerged certain specific identities of the Malayali female workers in white-collar professions.

This meso-level study shows that caste-based migration networks of south Indians during the colonial period facilitated Malayali migration for labour to various Defence establishments in the city and continued into the decades after Independence. The existence of such a migration network in Pune formed the social capital for migrants. I argue that in the early decades following Independence the migration network of Malayalis tied to the Defence establishments in Pune were influential, comprising mainly of upper castes and middle classes from Kerala and Tamil Nadu regions. Women benefitted from this migration network, comprising kin and close relations,

and friends, in finding paid employment but their ‘agency’ to find work was confined within gendered expectations of the ethnic community.

I have shown in this chapter that the social identities enacted by migrant women were based on values espoused in the migrant community’s narratives of the ideal *pravasi* (migrant). The ideal Malayali *pravasi* was evaluated based on community-centric mindset, maintenance of relationship with kin, and the use of Malayalam in conversations, all of which established cultural competency. Within this immigrant community, individuals also identified themselves as educated, hardworking and sincere, qualities which they noted as being crucial in deserving the job opportunities and positions that were made available to them through the influence of these networks. In this chapter I establish that these set of values were central in shaping the community’s ethnic identity in the region and in defining the social identities of female workers. However, the same qualities of being sincere and hardworking were interpreted differently by those outside the community such as the Shiv Sena as south Indians’ “subservience to authority”. The Malayali immigrants in Pune encountered minor discontent from among the local population due to the former’s access to employment opportunities in the city. Migrants across caste and class desired respectability in their professional spaces.

In this chapter, I introduce the concept of helping or ‘saving’ (*rakshapadutuka*), which was crucial in strengthening this migration network. Stronger communal bonds existed among the early migrant community due to proximity in relations shared among smaller immigrant groups. Shared experiences of relative poverty in Kerala and similar class backgrounds led to the concept of helping or saving others from the community, which further strengthened the social network in these decades. Within the concept of ‘helping’ or ‘saving’, migrants who made a foothold in the city and those in influential positions were “contact resources” (Lin, 1999) for potential migrants who were in search of employment opportunities in the city. In this regard the Controller of Defence Accounts, B M Menon, was a valued resource who espoused these ideals of the immigrant community in Pune by ‘saving’ as many Malayalis by giving them employment using his influence. During this period, the concept of ‘saving’ or helping played a crucial role in the way the community imagined itself in Pune. Such an imagination of the community also defined the social identities of female migrant workers.

The early generation of migrants had imbued the practice of help which represented the ethos of that generation of migrants in the city. Some of elderly migrant Malayalis in Pune lament the current loss of this aspect of their imagined culture with the precedence of class distinctions, growing individualism and acculturation over community bond.

In chapter three, “Internal labour migration of single, educated women”, I have adopted an integrative approach to combine meso-level and micro-level factors to understand a critical aspect of the economics of migration while addressing one of the central research questions that drive this thesis. What factors enabled single educated women to migrate for non-feminine jobs to Pune city in the decades after Independence?

Higher educational attainment and unmarried status were contributing factors in enabled upper caste, highly educated women to find attractive salaried jobs after migration. I observe that the other specific factors that were responsible for the migration of single educated women to Pune in the late 1960s up until the early 1980s were situated in the gendered notions of care work and in certain caste/class-based understanding of the working women within emerging Kerala modernity.

In this chapter I have made the critical observation that the women desired respectable jobs due to the concept of the ‘midukki penne’ (smart femininity). In the desire for certain professions and in the motivation to obtain it were situated the class-based notions of ‘being well-groomed’ and in social acknowledgment and acceptable of certain professions such as teaching and government jobs as ‘respectable’ in Kerala. As young girls, the respondents were drawn towards certain paid employment due to the influence of working women in such desirable employment as role models in their families involved in class-based occupations.

I argued that kin networks in Pune, also comprising of women, preferred female kin migrants to help with domestic labour and childcare. The same, the demand for women in care work for married couples in Pune, enable potential migrants to find employment in the city using their kin relations. Families allowed their daughters to accompany their sisters and brothers, or aunts to Pune. Due to the extended nature of families in Kerala, members of the household reached out to each other.

Pune was a desirable location for female migrants due to the presence of an influential migration network, the availability of government jobs and its reputation as a ‘safe’ city based on middle class caste-based assumptions of safety associated with the presence the army, and retired army personnel as well as “mild-mannered” and “cultured” Brahmins of Pune.

In chapter four I have examined the postmigration experiences of urbanization and settlement of female migrants who had undertaken interstate labour migration in India. The chapter titled “Postmigration and settlement experiences in Pune” observed three main themes to show that the lives of upper caste and middle class women continued to be regulated by the domain of the ‘private’ even into their old age. They engaged in the realm of the public when they were employed, which gave them access to alternative spaces – in the space of the office and while commuting – to form identities and build friendships.

I have asserted that lack of proper housing facilities for migrants in Pune prior to mid-1980s adversely affected female migrants as the former’s mobility was restricted from home-to-work and work-to-home, which was along the lines of childhood socialization from home-to-school and school-from-school. Due to gendered notions of the ‘home’, uncertain or precarious nature of living arrangements in the city for migrants affected the female migrants more severely.

In this chapter I have also reasoned that the double burden of paid work and office work consumed and exhausted working women. Some of the women took voluntary retirement in order to manage children, housework and in certain cases their spouse. Migration of women from Kerala to Pune using kin-familial support created a restrictive environment for women that increased double burden through compulsory heterosexual marriages based on traditional family structures involving childbirth and gendered division of domestic labour. Respectability was a critical factor that encouraged women to remain in the labour force in addition economic mobility.

Working women expressed a sense of guilt with respect to being ‘absent’ or ‘not having enough time’ to be around their children during their formative years. As older migrants in Pune they empathized with their working children and chose to stay back in the city to take care of their grandchildren and be close to their children even

though some of them expressed a desire to return to Kerala. Their presence in the house as grandparents helped their working children and their spouses.

The current research is a qualitative study on internal migration conducted on the basis of field interviews in an urban destination and primarily focusing on migrants and memories of their experiences. It uses observations at the level of the community and the individual, with a particular focus on women in order to use the category of gender as a critical parameter of analysis. This research is centered on migrant women as historical subjects to understand internal labour migration in India through life narratives. The thesis relies on language in its written and spoken form as data; the collection and use of photographs having enhanced and shaped the understanding of discourse analysis.

In migration and gender scholarship, this research on the interstate migration of single women for employment captures the dynamic nature of internal migration in India in the 1970s and 1980s. As a feminist migration research, the thesis focuses on the determinants of female labour migration by studying the regional particularities such as spread of literacy and educational attainment among women, urbanisation and industrialisation of Pune that attracted migrants, the requirements of unpaid care work, and historical nature of labour markets that gave opportunities to educated female migrants. It also examines the relationship between motherhood and guilt, and the double burden on working women.

A historical study focusing on the lives of educated and working women from among Nair and Christian denominations can locate the advantages and disadvantages faced by ‘privileged’ women who joined the formal labour markets in postcolonial India. Most of my respondents were women who enjoyed a certain set of privileges with respect to their class and caste status, and able-bodiedness. They were also among the few well-educated women in the period under study, and belonged mainly to landed families, and communities that benefitted from the spread of education, particularly at higher educational levels, and whose families were supportive of their aspiration for work. Therefore, the study may not be able to capture the concerns of migrant women battling multiple and overlapping deprivations and discriminations, and who have been denied even basic rights to the city and life.

Outlook

The historical lived realities of working women who migrated for labour show that the increasing and gradual withdrawal of women of “all adult age groups” from the labour force with rising income levels among households is clearly “a strategy to reduce the double burden of paid and unpaid work among women” (Abraham, 2013, p. 104). This research supports Abraham’s argument that more women are opting out of paid labour to reduce the double burden and conform to patriarchal societies’ rejection and stigmatization of paid work for women and engage instead in status production activities (2013, p. 104).

Following liberalisation and neoliberalism women have been encouraged to join the workforce and their participation continues to be encouraged through policies and concessions, and a certain degree of awareness have come to stay on the existence of double burden. Unfortunately, this is not the whole picture as the trend of women’s withdrawal from the labour force persists.

Within the capitalist organization of production in patriarchal social system, significance is placed on the male breadwinner as an indicator of the social status of the household (Abraham, 2013, p. 100). In return women’s paid work is stigmatized and associated with lower social status. In Indian society, the practice of domestic isolation of women is linked to upper caste practices that linked social status to women’s mobility and sexual purity (Abraham, 2013, p. 100). Upward social mobility linked to economic development and increasing household income seems to have strengthened cultural preferences for men in the labour market and “withdrawal of women from the labour market and confinement to domestic arena” (Abraham, 2013, p. 100).

Abraham (2013) also points towards “cultural preferences of females to remain within” the realm of the private/domestic and limit their involvement or activities outside this space (Abraham, 2013, p. 104). This has further reduced their visibility in public spaces. These factors have led to the reduced participation of urban women and rural women in higher income groups in the formal labour force (Abraham, 2013, p. 104).

Many men also leave the work force, however while for women a turn to domesticity

is considered 'normal' or in some cases 'desirable', for men the same is viewed as 'irresponsible', 'less manly' or being 'worthless' and involves the loss of status. Contemporary labour force market is a difficult space for workers, however most often men dominate these spaces as women are given the option of a passage out into the traditional space of domesticity that is feminized.

Feminization of domestic activity and the lower value assigned to women's labour encourages stigmatization of male participation in pure domestic activities. Men who share domestic work with women in the household are viewed as less masculine, thereby losing their social status (George, 2005). The loss of prestige of the primary male breadwinner is expected to lower the status of the household including that of the women in the community.

All these factors have informed research on women's withdrawal from the labour market. Additionally, I am particularly interested in further investigating the effects of motherhood and 'guilt', and dominant cultural ideologies and practices in determining educated women's contemporary labour migration and work force participation in the context of internal migration in India. In this regard, this study has provided an understanding of feminist migration research that will be beneficial for further studies in this direction.