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# Socialities and Gender in Care. Domestic Migration in India

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**Abstract:** How do processes of migration affect and get shaped by the apparently inescapable gendering of care work across the many differences and hierarchies among women in diverse contexts? How can we map the patterns of migration, gender, and paid work with the relations and mutualities of being necessary and desired in care? Much of the discussion on gender, care, and migration has focussed on international female migrant care workers. The large numbers of domestic migrants and the variety of their work is barely acknowledged in this literature. The literature on domestic migration has also tended not to account for the complexity of gender and labour of people on the move. This paper examines the reworkings of the nexus of gender and care within three streams of domestic migration in India, drawing largely on a wide range of ethnographic studies. They are viewed in terms of movements in and out and through networks of social relations, where care relations are built anew in and through their spatial movements.

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# Socialities and Gender in Care. Domestic Migration in India[1]

## Drawing the field

Care points to the inherent relationality of human and social life, its inescapability urgent, but obscured (Tronto 1993). A concern with care is tied to gender, women's work, and equality. In moving care with and beyond reproductive labour, differentiations and intersectionalities shaping paid and unpaid care labour and questions of affect, intimacy, instrumental reason, moral training, resources, and power become pertinent.

Many issues came to the fore with the growing transnational flows of women filling care needs in wealthier countries: linkages between gendered, shifting patterns of paid work and paid and unpaid care work, emerging professions in care and intimate labour, global capitalism and inequalities, social and economic reproduction, and state policy and citizenship (Gottfried/Chun 2018). International migrant, female workers faced dilemmas in balancing earning, care labour, love, and ideas of family. Attention to their childcare concerns back home constructed concepts of care chains, care substitution, and care drain (Gamburd 2000; Parreñas 2005; Lutz/Palenga-Mollenbeck 2012; Hochschild/Devi/Isaksen 2013).

The attention to care concerns of intra-country migrants, whether in their destination or place of origin has been much less (Massey 2009). Research and policy naturalised gendered divisions of labour and took for granted and devalued both unpaid, familial and paid care labour of women, as well as the importance of care concerns for the economy and in shaping spatial mobility. Critiques focussed on unveiling the economic and livelihood significance of women's mobility and work rather than care. It reflected the tenor of much of the concerns of migrants: first came provisioning or "taking care of" (Tronto 1993) and then care infrastructure such as water, sewage, and schooling.[2] Yet, direct unpaid care and relations do shape decisions to move, as among the circular Santhali migrants studied by Nitya Rao (2006, 131). Care of children and the elderly is usually women's responsibility and a worry when they are left behind.

In this context, the idea of care substitution is problematic. It can suggest a lack of change and complexity in care prior to that stimulated by large scale

1 I thank the participants at the "Care – Migration – Gender. Ambivalent Interdependencies from a Transdisciplinary Perspective" conference held at Humboldt University and the anonymous referees, whose comments contributed in many ways to this paper.

2 Seen in studies such as the TISS film and documentation project.

migration. It can reiterate a naturalisation of motherhood and the gendered responsibilities for care and assume an "intrinsic mutuality of being" between mother and child. It takes the modern, western model of the nuclear family-household as the norm across socio-cultural contexts. Looking to the variety of family-household living in Africa and South Asia, Arjan de Haan asserted the need "to understand family dynamics while studying processes of migration and vice versa" (2006, 121). Unfortunately, he too focussed on paid work or extra-household work.

I set aside the concept of care substitution in this paper. While recognising care chains, I explore unpaid care work at the destination. I draw on the emphasis in the new mobilities paradigm on the "the co-constitution of subjects, spaces, and meanings" and that "concerns for 'homing' are as important as moving" (Sheller 2014, 790–791). The latter are not necessarily in contradiction; mobility increasingly characterises life and is ubiquitous. Gendered livelihood possibilities, paid and unpaid care practices and relations in the gendered flows of migration shape meanings of home and space for women and their families and vice versa. Migration is a process starting before the physical movement and never quite ending – materially, in organising lives, and in thought.

To appreciate this, I look at care relationships as the making of mutuality of being in three streams of domestic spatial mobility: transferable employees, long term migrants, and seasonal, circular migrants. Though limited by available studies, I outline the gendered care arrangements and relationships in and across these streams in separate sections. I conclude by drawing out aspects of the making of mutualities of being and the co-constitution of subjects, spaces, and meanings.

In Marshall Sahlins' notion of "mutuality of being", the "transmission of life-capacities among persons and the meaning of participating in one another's life are central" (2011a, 13). Thinking of care as the transmission of life-capacities among persons and meaningful participation in one another's life evokes an idea that many have stressed: the doing of care is essential to life itself, is embedded in social relations, makes social relations, makes subjects. For many people, not least migrants, care responsibilities and desires may be the motivation for the life they live. Sahlins argued for this concept both to recognise that people valorise such relations and to break the naturalised connection between reproductive biology and kinship in Euro-American systems and anthropological models. I appropriate his idea, but (given the limitations of a journal article) cannot expand on his exegesis on "being" and "participation" (Sahlins 2011b) or pursue his (and my) interest in kinship, family, and intimacy per se. Some caveats are in order, however. The differentiation, hierarchy, and exclusions in kinship and family

that Janet Carstens (2013) says Sahlins overlooked are palpable in everyday care (Tronto 1993). Further, while care relations are experienced as inter-personal and individual, they make and are made in the dynamics and values of communities, ideological formations, and state and market institutions. The political is intrinsic to care relations and mutuality of being, in which power is both productive in the Foucauldian sense and iniquitous.

## Dimensions of domestic migration in India

The domestic migration literature has focussed on and debated volumes and trends in numbers and data instruments, economic factors shaping migration, source and destination regions, distances, time span, periodicity, individual/group patterns of movement, age and social composition, types of paid work and recruitment, occupational changes, employment conditions and vulnerabilities, access to social protection and civic rights, and implications for economic advancement or inequality, with gender becoming an issue in the recent decades. The relations and work of unpaid care, which shape women's movements, is little discussed, except in a few qualitative studies and those that have critiqued "male-centric analysis" (cf. Neetha 2004). In focussing on this neglected issue, care practices are excavated from this literature and from studies of residents of urban settlements and shanties who are largely migrants.

Domestic migration is huge in many countries. The 2011 Census of India estimates 450 million internal migrants,[3] much more than international migrants.[4] Domestic migration becoming a step to international migration has a history longer than that of contemporary globalisation (that cannot be elaborated here). The options, desires, or coercions of mobility, of who will stay or go with whom, how, and where, of the social relations in which movements take place, of whether or not return is envisaged differs with socio-economic group, time, and place. Describing specifics is necessary to open up the relational dynamics of care, gender, and mobility.[5]

Official macro data show lower rates of economic migration for India than most Asian countries (Rao 2017), especially of permanent migrants to urban areas, due to economic and state created constraints and data instruments that miss the multiple dimensions of migration (Deshingkar/Akter 2009). Indu

3 Over 37% of the female population may be classified as migrants (CWDS 2020).
4 Including of nurses (John 2019, 20).
5 In India, the entry of middle class and elite women into full-time work outside the home cannot explain the growing demand for paid domestic/care workers, unlike in the West. Historically, domestic servants were tied to households whose women were not working outside and low rates of women's employment continue (Ray/Qayum 2009).

Agnihotri, Indrani Mazumdar, and N. Neetha argue that migration, particularly women's employment-linked migration, is not captured by the "monocausal approach to migration [...] a lack of focus on circular modes of labour migration, and a [...] purely individual labour unit" (2012, 20), the last assumed to be a male breadwinner. They calculated around 10 million female labour migrants and 57 million male labour migrants from the 2007–2008 National Sample Survey[6] forming respectively about 20% of the income earning male work force in India and 12% of the female (2012, 40, 43). The last figure aligns with the very low figures of the paid female workforce in India.

Marriage-linked migration forms the largest category of female migrants and of all migrants in India, a factor in the increasing rate of female migration in the previous three decades (Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012, 23pp.). Data instruments may wrongly include women migrants in this category, but post-marriage mobility is a long-standing practice in the sub-continent. It is tied to rules of village/neighbourhood exogamy, especially in north, west, and east India, and patrivirilocal marriage: brides move to the husband's parental home. Women may move back and forth between their marital and natal homes for work, including unpaid care giving (Palriwala 2018). This speaks of the importance of viewing migration as flows and that women have been long attuned to spatial mobility as a way of life in which care is central. I do not focus on marriage migration here,[7] but it is an entry point to understand the co-constitution of the social relations of gender, care, and spatial movement and forms a backdrop to discussions below.

Macro processes engendering migration patterns shape homemaking and care. Among the contemporary processes are the increasing loss of rural livelihoods, shifts in available types of work,[8] and growing inequalities between and within regions and class[9] (Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012; Rao 2017). Multiplicity in occupations, livelihood sources, and locations of earning has long marked workers and households, but those straddling the urban and rural have increased (Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018). The "agrarian crisis was [...] perceived

6 When this paper was written, the 2011 Census and the 2007–2008 NSS employment survey were the last macro data sets on migration and even the most recent literature drew on them.

7 On international marriage migration, see Rajni Palriwala and Patricia Uberoi (2008).

8 For rural women, work participation rates declined from 34% in 1983 to 25% in 2011–2012 and then to 18% in 2017–2018. For rural men it remained close to 55% and then fell to 52%. Employment rates grew slightly in manufacturing, construction, and various services, for women domestic services in particular; yet there was a 1% decline in the urban ratio for women and only a 2% growth for urban men, indicating the livelihood crisis (NSO 2019). The work participation rate was higher for migrants than for total workers (CWDS 2020).

9 Vamsi Vakulabharanam and Sripad Motiram (2016) argued that the increase in the Gini co-efficient for monthly per capita consumption from 0.33 in 1983–1984 to 0.37 in 2009–2010 was an underestimation, and migration has furthered existing inequalities. The income share of the top 1% increased from around 6% in 1984 to 22% in 2012 (Chancel/Piketty 2017).

by movement activists as aggravating vulnerability and distress in migration" (Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012, 9). Loss of land through "development", natural calamities, caste stigma and abuse, and religious violence led to coerced or chosen displacement. Improved communication and transport have furthered circular, seasonal migration in numbers and distances travelled. The emergence of a young, aspirational demographic, the search for upward mobility through professional and white-collar work, along with a desire to escape local patriarchal and feudal controls or find adventure, have also encouraged geographical movement.

Public policy measures, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act that provided limited, low wage employment in rural areas since the last decade, reduced migration of the rural poor and landless to an extent. Squeezing of these programmes gave seasonal migration a new fillip. Programmes limited to "locals" and permanent residents denied benefits to migrants (Rogaly et al. 2001; Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012). Continuing, indeed intensifying, caste and religious discrimination add to migrants' vulnerabilities. State policy and ideas of well-being build on ideas of gendered work and social relations, compulsory, heteronormative marriage, and an essentialised mutuality of being and responsibility in gendered familialism (Palriwala/Neetha 2011). Public facilities and the infrastructure of care (for children, elderly care, and health) are lacking or expensive.

The literature helps delineate contexts, streams, and forms of domestic migration. The three streams I look at (sizes are debated), are not the same as the categorisations found in many studies (Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012; Deshingkar/Ather 2009; Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018), though not entirely different. The term *stream* emphasises flow and internal heterogeneity even in one location: of motivations and factors, distances moved, the period away from and links to source areas, gendering, individual or household migration, age, sex, and social composition, economic level, livelihoods and sectors of paid work. The streams are interconnected, with specificities in the intertwining dynamics of gender, paid and unpaid care, agency, and spatial mobility in each. In all, the tenacity of connection between femininity, unpaid familial care work, and paid care work at lower levels of status, pay, and classifications of skill is evident. I take networks of social relations as central, where care relations are reiterated and built anew, in and through spatial movements.

The first stream of transferable employees is the smallest in numbers of the three and the elite among domestic migrants. The mobilities paradigm

helps mainstream their periodic spatial mobility. The second stream of long-term migrants are the most varied in movement and economically, socially, and politically. The service occupations of many are a contact point with the first stream. Long term migrants often begin as the third stream: short term, seasonal, circular migrants. In crisis, they may again join that stream. The last are perhaps the largest in number, even if, as indicated, macro data on them is particularly weak.[10] The three streams are perforce discussed unevenly, due to the nature of both published and grey literature. I supplement this with newspaper and media reportage and my ethnographic fieldwork in Delhi and its vicinity undertaken over the last four decades, largely oriented to other concerns. In the first two streams of migration, following the available qualitative studies, I mostly look at migrants in urban north and west India, while the literature relevant to the third stream of seasonal migration brings in rural-to-rural migrants in East India and socially marginalised groups.

The first two streams tend to be economically better off than the cognate non-migrant, but the short-term, circular migrants tend to the bottom of economic and social hierarchies. On most axes of stratification (income, wealth, occupation, social group, social policy coverage, status and prestige, political heft) one moves downwards as one goes from the first to the third stream and fairly sharply. The habitations of the three streams are distinct. Large inequalities of living space and infrastructures of water, sanitation, schools, transport, add to the inequalities of income, civic citizenship, and the burden or lack of care giving possibilities. Correlated differences in the gendered patterns of movement, paid work, and care across these streams are discussed below.

## Transfer migrants

Officially compulsory, periodic moves in the place of work and thence residence (transfers) are demanded in the middle and upper levels of the bureaucracy, police, and varied government organisations, across the armed forces, and occasionally in private employment. This stream could be thought of as nomads, but senior civil servants and officers have a prestige not associated with nomads today. They are in formal, secure employment and are predominately upper caste men. Their social, cultural, and political significance outweighs their relatively small numbers in the total workforce and migration numbers. They are paradigmatic of the gendered practices of care among the elite and middle classes. There is little research on them. The analysis is based partly on studies

10 Governmental inattention to the huge numbers and extreme precarity of internal migrants became tragically evident with the COVID linked national lockdown (Srivastava 2020b).

of their hired domestic workers (migrant or local) whom I expand on later and on personal narratives and conversations.

Even among this elite, the nuclear family, let alone the extended family, may be dispersed; transfers can be to male, non-family stations, as among the armed forces, or to "hardship" postings, or children's schooling is not to be disturbed. Care arrangements do not disrupt pre-existing gender divisions and hierarchies of work and income, even in the absence of family women or if the paid carer is a man. The infrastructure and formal and informal contexts of care and community are easily put in place where the transferable officer (alone or with family) usually moves to. Their adult children speak of both the difficulties and joys of the periodic moves, friends and multiple carers in the semi-closed, residential communities; spouses form long-term networks of support and status competition with each other. There is access to the best of schooling and medical care, both public and private, linked to rank and income levels. With spatial dispersal of the extended family, care of the elderly can become a concern, at least till retirement, when past collegiality and community experiences shape where to "return" to or "settle".

Hired domestic workers are available, hoping to live in the "servant's quarters" of officers' accommodation or living in nearby settlements, at times of migrants. Among the upper ranks, the hired domestic worker/nanny may travel with their employer on transfer. The wife/mother, however, even if she is in extra-household work and other gendered practices are modified, is the care manager (a pattern found across the globe) arranging household maintenance, care of the sick and the elderly, children's studies and extra-curricular activities, and a social life and hospitality to further networks and careers. Aspirations and changing ideas of food, education, ritual, femininity, and demands of "good" childcare combine with deployments and reassertions of intertwined heteronormative norms and class/caste status to expand both the care terrain and hiring of carers. Rather than extra-household childcare (largely absent, whether public or private), home-based care is the preferred practice. "Mother presence", albeit not care labour, carries a new affectivity, even if children are placed in boarding schools. Ideas of socialising themselves and their children into colonial, western, and hybrid modernities and practices make it compelling.[11] Kin back home, older generations, and hired staff of a "lower" education/class/caste cannot ensure this.

In their work-defined communities of residence and socialising, modernity may be a cultural ethos, but many carry a long feudal history of household

11 The idea of "modern, progressive mothering" has a long, regionally differentiated history (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1990).

servants.[12] Further, in the current socio-political context, ascriptive identities and hierarchies of caste and religion are coming to the fore again. The presence of a family woman is necessary to keep hired carers "in place" (Tronto 1993), saying they are "like family" and yet distancing them and obscuring the dependency on them. The transmission of life capacities takes place in gendered personal relations, including those between the employer and the domestic worker. Depending on the length of that relationship, personal social histories, compatibility, and treatment of the worker, mutuality of being as meaningful participation may be asserted or denied by both.

In the first stream and the upper income layers of the second stream, the flux in the intertwining of gender and care work is complex. Everyday absence of male or female kin with spatial mobility in themselves do not lead to shifts. Family income, location, status, and women's paid or voluntary employment influence the type and numbers of hired domestic workers. The last is a growing and increasingly feminised force of migrant workers in the lower income levels of the second stream, reaffirming earlier gender dynamics of devalued care work, but entailing a more pervasive presence of temporary, hired intimates in the domestic domain and shifts in care organisation for both employer and employee.

## Long-term migrants

The movements of long-term migrants (the second stream) are primarily linked to exigencies of finding paid work, not conditionalities of formal employment. In most accounts, men lead the move, in line with gendered divisions of work and public space, the paid work available, skills learned, and care and social responsibilities. This is the most differentiated stream in occupations, incomes, status, lifestyle, and the doing of care. They may begin as low-income labour circulators (Mukherjee 1985), whose cycle of movement lengthens over the years or move for white collar, middle class employment with a decent income, status and prestige. Their place of migration does not change as frequently as the other streams, though they look for better opportunities and may shift residence within the town or city, as I found in my field studies (2007–2017) and activism (1982–1989) in settlements with a large presence of long-term migrants. Housing ranges from hutments and densely populated neighbourhoods with minimal civic facilities to multiple storied buildings and luxury complexes. As with the first stream, households cover the range of sub-nuclear, nuclear, and extended. A decline in the extended family is less evident in long term support than in discourse (Palriwala/Neetha 2018), evoked largely by the absence of kin in the daily care emblematic of morality and sociality – that of the elderly.

11 This is akin to the ideas and values that Ray and Qayum (2009) trace in the attitudes of employers of domestic servants in contemporary Kolkata.

Patterned shifts in the relationship between the making of home, sociality, care, gender, and lives on the move is evident when we look at the lower economic layers of long-term migrants. A prolonged separation from spouse and parents is often an economic necessity for the first generation of male migrants. Incomes are uncertain, the move is meant to be temporary, and someone must tend to the village home, land and cattle (if any), children, the elderly, and local social ties. Relationships of the home enable the move and the stay. Wives and young children follow as some certainty of earnings and the desire for familial care grow or as macro-processes push more to migrate to earn. Habitations are made less temporary and, increasingly, children's schooling regularised. Family and care responsibilities in the place of origin remain a concern. Described as semi-permanent (Srivastava 2020a) or middle migrants (Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018), long term migrants may never admit to giving up on return. They lead a multi-local life, fostering social relations through remittances, communications, visits, and care for kin at "home". Retaining connection is important in their vision of the future. For the second generation, the care and sociality that make home is where they have grown up. Despite the pleasures of pampered visits to the ancestral home (*desh/gaon*), they highlight the differences of culture and living. This deters the parents' return. In old age, they wish to be near their children who have the duty to care for them, even when knowing that care is uncertain.

## Women-led migration

The earlier narratives in folksongs and studies were that women stayed back. There are other accounts, however. One is that of women over the last century (widowed, divorced, abandoned) seeking livelihoods and escaping social and moral censure, to bring up their children and make new sexual liaisons in anonymous, urban environments (Sen 1999).

A contemporary narrative is of single women and girls as well as married women, migrating alone or with a friend or relative, articulated as temporary. They take the initiative, obtaining the required familial "permissions" (Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012, 58). Motivations and justifications are varied: lack of livelihoods in their places of origin, better education for their children, quarrels with in-laws, escaping family constraints or the type of work that was their lot in the village, earning a dowry, a desire for the 'modernities' seen on television (Kaur 2006; Khurana 2015; Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018). These narratives speak of women's affect for children and concerns for their care as motivations

(Neetha 2004; Khurana 2015), contradicting the idea that these responsibilities stop their spatial mobility. Childcare and unpaid household care responsibilities, heteronormative rules of movement in public spaces, and training and skills do not entirely shape women's paid employment (Khurana 2015; Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018, 106pp.): with male or female kin (construction or garments) or on their own (paid domestic work) outside the house or in home-based work (garments). Critically, their low incomes from labouring for better-off migrants and non-migrants enable care by "providing".

Living arrangements vary. At the cusp of circular migration, young, unmarried women may live in barrack-like rented accommodation (Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018, 1004), similar to that of single male migrants. Of hired domestic workers, Neetha says, "[s]ocial networking, which is largely female centred, is found to influence the migration decision, the process of migration and also the day-to-day life of the migrants. [...] The network also defines the social arena [... and] accommodation" (2004, 1685).

## Shifts in care work and sociality

These migrants tend to live near people of their own region (Kaur 2006; Kasturi 1990), even village. The residential and social organisation of many habitations is "similar to village sections and lanes – people connected with each other through links of kinship/friendship/village/region" (Kaur 2006, 207). Doors left open in the day and informal exchange help manage life, especially regarding employment. Despite laments that the times are of diminished support, care, and affective relations, there is aid in times of illness and injury and in tiding over short spells of unemployment.[13] Gender norms and social controls of places of origin are also active; but the communities and networks do go beyond ascriptive ties. Socialities draw on relationships with new neighbours, co-tenants and/or co-workers and a recognition that women have to be away from home.

Nuclear households and an individual income give women greater bargaining power, independence, and space for emotional ties and intimacy with the spouse, but the absence of co-resident kin also means an expansion in their own unpaid domestic work and care and a lack of non-spousal familial intimacies. Child minding arrangements shift. In most rural occupations, women took infant children with them if no adult or older child was at home as childminder. Urban employment regimes in paid domestic work, factories, and offices and commuting difficulties mean that all adults may be absent, but children must

13 Documented among migrant male workers living near Delhi. Return is forced when the lack of work grips all, as with the COVID lockdown.

be left behind. Institutional childcare is largely absent. Daily care can attenuate (Palriwala/Neetha 2011). Women spoke of a new unreliability of elderly male kin or unemployed husbands in minding children (Palriwala/Neetha 2010, 521pp.). Self-care by children, sibling care, children left in a space close to their work site (as in construction work), and a casual neighbourly "eye" aided by the lack of privacy of homes become more important. The local community and, for some women, natal kin who live not too far, gain a new significance in everyday care. Daily proximity and care shape emerging social relations.

A three-way difference can be traced in how gender, employment, and care practices play out, not very different between migrant and non-migrant. The income-earning labour of female, home-based workers is submerged in their domestic and care work, even when designated male earners are not earning. The earnings of women working in teams with their husbands, as in construction, often do not come into their hands; care responsibilities define their priorities, but the move to and added movement within the city give them a new confidence (Khurana 2015). A third, hired domestic workers, get employment and an individual income through their own networks; they interact with a world beyond their family, village, and community. This can produce a new self-confidence, reflected in social relations and economic strategies.[14] Despite such advantages, however, paid domestic work is not always the work of choice, not least due to the intimate control by the employer. It may be the fallback: other work is not possible or, as part-timers employed near their residences, they are able to check on their children during the day. Women withdraw from paid work outside the home if care demands become critical (cf. Rao 2017, 246 on demands of reproductive labour).

Women speak of their paid work as caring for their children; the last justified many acts: hiding their income, not visiting their places of origin as frequently as they "should", denying economic support to kin back home unless their children were there, new liaisons (Khurana 2015; Kaur 2006; Gidwani/Ramamurthy 2018). Their housework responsibilities (for instance, house repairs) go beyond that of middle class housewives, but the latter's new standards of household maintenance are not for them, especially in locations with poor civic facilities. Taking children to doctors and hospitals, visiting their schools, and dealing with other public institutions are among their new "care" tasks. Accumulating official documents and identity cards to prove their citizenship and access subsidised food grains, the right to stay where they live, a modicum of civic facilities (cf. Srivastava 2020a), and government schools require visits to public offices and

14 Also seen in the narrative of a migrant woman vegetable vendor (Llewelyn 2009).

elected representatives. Not all women are involved in these tasks, but they often fall on long-term female migrants, who are literate and/or work outside the home (Khurana 2015).

Women are involved in decisions to move and how to stay, with new possibilities in consumption, values, behaviours, and the demands of paid work. Yet, as with women in transferable employee households, the fostering of their unpaid care in making new and old inter-personal relationships and sociality and facilitating new opportunities for their children is important. Along with flexibility in the expanded areas of paid work, women and neighbours uphold care work as primarily feminine work and earning as that of husbands/men, the latter criticised if they do not provide (Grover 2011).

## Seasonal migration

The last stream, seasonal, short-term, circular migrants are the new nomads. They oscillate between place of origin and destinations in annual or shorter cycles, depending on the type and availability of work and pay in each location. This may continue for years, with the destination changing even within the year. Scholars have pointed out that macro data on this category is poor (among others: Banerjee/Ray 1991; Rogaly et al. 2001; Deshingkar/Farrington 2009), though Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha (2012) emphasise that activists, NGOs, and a few localised, qualitative studies had been highlighting this stream. They constitute the largest number of migrants after marriage migrants, growing as the agrarian crisis has intensified. They are more likely than other streams to be of stigmatised castes and groups, the propertyless, poorer, engaged in hard manual labour with low wages, and diminished, if any, access to subsidised food grain and other social protection measures on migration (Agnihotri Mazumdar/Neetha 2012; Banerjee/Ray 1991; Rao 2006; Srivastava 2020a). Studies focus on their economic and social vulnerability, with little attention to care concerns. Gender rules in everyday care practices are most under stress and public support, whether from state institutions or the middle classes, least in evidence.

The contradictory affects in statements of long-time women seasonal migrants outline some of the intertwined processes and materialities. Narayan Banerjee and Lokenath Ray tell us that an undertone of "misery [...] anxiety, sadness and helplessness was intimately associated" with the migrants' word for their seasonal movement [*Namal*], even as one asserted, "As a young child she used to accompany her parents year after year [...and was] fascinated at first seeing new places" (1991, 2). But "[g]radually it became a monotonous journey

and at the same time, an evil necessity. It was a labyrinth from which there was no way out" (1991, 230). Why the misery? Summarising:

> "[…] neglect of children's health and education, deteriorating health of family members, especially of women, unstable family life due to change of residence three or four times a year, increase in bigamy, divorce, desertion, indignity suffered by women at workplace [sic] as well as during travel, discontinuity in asset management such as livestock, house, backyard gardens, etc., fragmented and ad-hoc approach to social development of family, low, uncertain income, a vicious cycle of indebtedness" (1991, 2).

One still said that "she had absolutely no feeling of guilt for whatever she had done to keep her body and soul together" (1991, 230). They no longer wanted their nomadic existence, however, as the reasons to enter it (care of children, fostering of family and social life, and security) were undermined rather than realised. That these are not narratives of the past is evident in recent documentation of the post-Covid lockdown.

Circular migrants tend to move in groups (construction and agricultural work), as couples (brick making), and, depending on the work and age, may include children and the elder generation (Banerjee/Ray 1991; Rogaly et al. 2001; Rao 2006; Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012). Children likely accompany mothers, though they may do better on some counts if they stay behind (Coffey 2013). A major shift in organising care is to move cooking and related tasks from the individual household to community cooking, especially if the migrants are single men. A co-migrant woman may be hired or young unmarried men given the responsibility. Women may rotate tasks of cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and child minding (Rao 2006). The rural practice of children accompanying parents to the fields can now mean insecure and unhealthy construction sites or brick fields. The living conditions are rough and long, intense work hours making even minimal care/domestic tasks difficult (Llewelyn 2009, 231). Women complain of their inability to regularly bathe their children, who often suffer from respiratory and digestive tract ailments. Care for the ill is curtailed as it would mean loss of wages, but could eventually demand return to the place of origin.

Care deficits and care gaps appear very real, not least for those at "home", which remains the place of origin. Girls are rarely left behind, due to concerns over their sexual safety and as they can care for younger siblings, cook, and fetch water for the family on the move. Difficulties of travel and moving, inability to do hard labour, tending to the little dwelling, land, and animals and children's schooling determine who is left behind. Remittances are essential for the latter's

basic survival and the feeling of shared care and love, part of their mutuality of being. However, low incomes make default a constant fear. In a crisis, the elderly and children left behind may not get support from even the close kin nearby (Massey 2009). One activist saw women migrants make quick bus journeys to check on children and leave money, though it placed much physical stress on them (Brinda Karat, cited in Agnihotri/Mazumdar/Neetha 2012, 48).

## Pulling threads together

The transmission of life capacities and meaningful participation in another's life is not unidirectional; those who give care are also made in these social relations. The transmission of life capacities requires personal, one-to-one relations, dependence, and knowledge. This varies with indirect and direct care tasks, the latter entailing greater bodily intimacy and face-to-face sociality and time in the everyday. Rather than a pre-given home or mutuality of being, care and social relations make them. Unpacking the nexus of gender, care, and mobility exposes the hard work, friction, and uncertainty integral to the transmission of life capacities, homing, and making mutuality of being, and their shaping by political, ideational, and economic processes beyond the immediate and the personal.

Care and mutualities of being draw on and build gendered, intra-familial patterns of work and responsibility, variously within and across the migration streams discussed. The possibilities in the content of care given, care relations, and home diverge with economic means and place, even within similar cultural groups in the same time-space. Heteronormative and extended family relations and rules are pushed in their everyday, with the greater independent earnings and movement of migrant women in public domains. Yet, they are far from transformed, not least among the larger number of migrant households where women are in unpaid or home-based work or the most modern and elite sections. All demand feminine care and give priority to children and their future over other care demands. Across classes and streams of migrants, inter-generational, daily care of the elders and grandchildren are attenuated. Extra-household kinship and social relations, that were built and maintained in the everyday, fray with spatial distance, despite attempts to foster them through social interaction, communication, and materially.

In the third stream and groups of the second, such as construction and hired domestic workers, low incomes and migration interlock. Mobility and the

absence of all working adults in long hours of paid work engender insecurity and time stress in care and care relations. Basic needs ("taking care of" dependents) motivate the very actions that appear to the middle class and elite as knowing violation of care responsibilities: children left alone or in each other's care or brought to non-safe work places. Among the elite, transferable employees and others, financial well-being is not under stress and does not depend on women's income. Ways of doing care have been modified. Increasingly, labour is hired for basic tasks of indirect care, leaving women/mothers with time to invest in new ideas of education for their children and of becoming modern. They can moan about, but not condemn, other family members who do not help.

The first stream and upper layers of the second stream connect in their daily lives with a variety of hired care and domestic workers, mostly female and migrant, paid according to task, time, and 'skill'. A sense of good care seems to require a diffuse construct of a gift with the technicalities of the tasks. Morality is mobilised to obscure the instrumentality of the relationship and the political economy of the relationship. The difficulty in building sociality, mutuality, and affect between employer and domestic worker, migrant or not, can be exacerbated by the non-formal work contract, which both push. Sociality may be disrupted before the relationship settles in as the fragile urban citizenship of the hired migrant forces her to move or her unpaid care responsibilities force her out of paid work. Paid care or conflict are not antithetical to meaningful participation in each others' lives, but may not be a happy sort. The meaning of participating in one another's life can be diminishing for both the worker and the employer, who may live in fear and suspicion of a non-kin intimate inside the home.

Employers mask labour extraction by devaluing the work and asserting that the worker is "like family" and "should" so work (Joseph/Lobo/Natarajan 2018). They simultaneously claim and deny mutuality of being with their hired carers, holding on to cultural distances of class, region, caste, and other hierarchies: they are servants.[15] Mutuality and the gift economy carry and reaffirm inequalities and hierarchies. The worker invokes familial dependence on the employer and the gift of care to request material and other assistance in a context of low wages. They come to deny mutuality, if help is refused or there is mental or physical abuse. Except in the last situation, familial care responsibilities and even a need to return "home" are given as reasons to resign without severing future

15 This was blatant in the infamous Mahagun case where the worker was accused of theft and beaten, her community attacked as illegal migrants for their religion (John 2017); and in the refusal to pay those who could not or were not allowed to come to work during the COVID restrictions.

ties. The choice of part-time work with multiple employers is in part an attempt by domestic workers to escape constant control by a single employer and assert the mutuality of being of their own familial care demands.

Even in unpaid care, both the carer and cared for may feel oppressed or a loss of self, a lack of choice in having to give care and in the care received. Abuse and inequality in their unpaid care relationships is less easily acknowledged. Its affective quality makes it difficult to measure care and undergirds the persistence and veiling of gender differentiation, hierarchy, and exclusions, though mobility is a possible way out. What is named as kinship/family/home/domesticity and care (together, separately, and in their variety) resonate with ideas of mutuality of being, but are not equated. Not only can spatial distance attenuate domestic ties, migration flows have expanded extra-familial care work and interpersonal relations.

These elaborations of relatedness suggest change and fluidity in migrants' ideas and practices of "being" over time, place, and social group. They also necessitate a relook at Sahlins' gloss on mutuality of being as feeling that they are intrinsic to each other's existence and self. Despite the recognition of mutuality, material significance, necessity, and continuing care given/received involving intimacy of space, body, and time, both carer and cared may deny the relationship as desirable and intrinsic to themselves. The denial of meaningful participation in each other's lives may intensify in individualising contexts, in inimical relations, and in paid care, especially in contexts of deep inequality and where carers stay fleetingly, with insecurity and deepening contractualisation and fragmentation of care work. Migration may simultaneously facilitate and hamper care. Within the hard choices of economic and social compulsion, embedded in strategies of moving/homing that are gendered and not unique to the individual, the notion of and hope for building a mutuality of being in care relations is palpable.

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