

ECONOMIC PLIGHT
OF
HAMAAL WOMEN IN POONA

Sulabha Brahme
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INTRODUCTION

The present study was taken up with the view to examine the economic and social conditions and the problems of one of the groups of unorganised women workers working in urban areas. The study is confined in its geographical coverage to Poona city area. The group selected for the survey is a group of women engaged in hamaal work i.e. manual work of transporting goods by headloads or hand-cartloads and the related activities. The study by itself is quite limited in scope. It is hoped that the study will contribute in some measure towards better understanding of the problems of employment of women in urban areas. The findings of this survey based on personal interviews of 75 hamaal women and the related information are presented in the following six chapters.

Changes in women's participation in gainful employment in India and the changing occupational structure of the working women in Poona are briefly reviewed in the first part of Chapter I. The survey methodology is described in the second part of this chapter. The place of origin and reasons for leaving the home place are discussed in chapter II. In Chapter III, the daily routine of work, the conditions of work, the rates of payment, unionisation and social organisations are described separately for the five major centres of hamaal work in Poona city. The demographic structure and the economic profile of the

population covered in the study are presented in Chapter IV. The housing and domestic conditions are reviewed in Chapter V. In the last chapter the problem of integration of the migrants in the urban economic and social structure and the special issues of women workers are discussed.

We would like to place on record our thanks due to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi for the research grant supporting the present study. We would like to express our gratitude to the hamaal women for their earnest cooperation. The activists, organizers and several members of the Hamaal Panchayat were very helpful throughout the conduct of the survey and we are grateful to them for their kind cooperation. We would like to thank Smt. Kumud Pore for her valuable and extensive suggestions on the draft report.

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Sulabha Brahme
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CHAPTER I

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT

Hamaal women* - the focus of the present study - together with most other women in employment in urban areas belong to the unorganised sector of the economy. Alongwith the workers in construction work, bidi work, workers in tanneries, handloom weaving, sweepers and scavengers, they share the following basic characteristics. (i) casual nature of employment, (ii) ignorance and illiteracy, (iii) small size of establishment with very low capital investment per person, (iv) scattered nature of establishments, (v) superior strength of employers.

Very few researches have been conducted in the field of these unorganised trades. The difficulties of collecting data are considerable because of the very nature of the trade. Against this background of general lack of serious investigations in relation to the unorganised women in the urban work force, a study covering the hamaal women in Poona City was planned.

It is noted that in India 94 per cent of the working women work in the unorganised sector.¹ Yet the studies carried in relation to the working women have by and large

* The women engaged in manual work of transporting goods by headload or handcart-load and in related activities are hereinafter referred to as hamaal women and the work they do as hamaal work.

focused their attention mainly on a very small section of the working women, viz. the educated women in white collar jobs.² The employment opportunities have relatively widened for this class in the last two decades because of the rapid expansion of the public sector activities and some professional openings. The problems of social adjustments and family adjustments form the focus of many of the studies relating to the women in white collar jobs. The basic problem of the lack of opportunities for gainful employment particularly for the women does not get high-lighted in these studies. The economic need for work is not as pressing for the women in white collar jobs as for the women from poorer strata of the society. In effect the problem of providing gainful employment to women does not emerge as a very acute and urgent problem from these studies.

In point of fact the issue of gainful work for women is becoming grave over time and particularly in the last decade or so, it has assumed serious dimensions. An examination of the trend in the employment of women will be helpful to gauge the magnitude of the problem (Table 1.1). Over the period of five decades between 1921 and 1971 a decline in the participation of women, who had been traditionally working in agriculture, artisan work and petty trade is noted. The number of women in work-force was more or less stable between 1911 and 1951. A sudden increase

Table 1.1 (a). Trend in employment of women (All India)

Year	Employment category				Percentage of female workers in total workers	Percentage of working women
	Agriculture (No. of female workers in '000)	Industry	Service	Total		
1911	30898	6137	4767	41802	34.44	33.73
1921	30279	5409	4407	40095	34.02	33.73
1931	27177	5147	5276	37600	31.17	27.63
1951	31062	4554	4923	40539	28.98	23.30
1961	47272	6884	5244	59402	31.53	27.98
1971	25060	3707	2931	31298	17.53	11.86

Table 1.1 (b). Female workers per 100 male workers (1971)

<u>Economic category</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Workers as		
Cultivators	13.34	9.25
Agricultural labourers	49.92	41.60
Livestock, Forestry and allied	23.43	14.41
Mining, Quarrying	17.93	11.96
Manufacturing, processing, etc.		
(a) Household industry	27.96	26.87
(b) Other than household industry	14.42	6.14
Construction	9.89	8.49
Trade and Commerce	8.04	4.59
Transport, storage and communications	2.16	2.46
Other services	15.41	18.70

in the employment during the decade 1951-1961 and a precipitous fall in the following decade viz. 1961-1971 are somewhat puzzling. However, the participation rate of women as noted in 1971 is very low. In 1971 the women workers formed only 17 per cent of the total workers and a little less than 12 per cent of the total women were in gainful employment. If the trend in the organized sector is examined it is noted that in factory employment the number of women workers increased to some extent between 1927 and 1946. A further expansion in the employment was noted between 1952 and 1971. However, the proportion of women workers in the total factory employment declined from about 16 per cent in 1927 to 11 per cent by 1952 and it was 9 per cent in 1971. The decline in the employment was marked in textile industry that accounted for about 30 per cent of the women in factory employment (Table 1.2). The other industries employing women are tea-industry, cashew-nut industry, rice mills, gins and presses, bidi industry. The employment of women in plantations remained stable over the period and the percentage share continued to be around 50. In the mining industry the women constituted about 20 per cent of the total work force upto the 'fifties but their proportionate share came down to about 15 per cent by the 'sixties. The major reasons for the decline or non-growth in the employment of women in the organised sector as indicated in various reports reviewing the situation

Table 1.2 (a). Trend in Employment of women in factories and plantations in British India

Year	Average daily employ- ment in '000		Percentage of women workers in total workers			
	Total workers	Women workers	All factories	Textile industry	Jute industry	Plantations
1927	1432	243	16.95	19.4	16.7	-
1932	1329	215	16.20	17.1	15.8	46.6
1937	1675	238	14.20	13.8	12.9	47.2
1942	2282	265	11.62	11.4	11.9	49.8
1946	2315	272	11.75	10.9	13.8	47.4

Table 1.2(b). Trend in Employment of women in factories in India

Year	Average daily employment in '000		Percentage of women workers in total workers						
	Total workers	Women workers	All factories	Textiles	Tobacco	Food	Gin and Presses	Non-metallic mineral products	Chemicals and chemical products
1952	2561	278	10.8	9.2	39.2	17.7	43.7	16.7	15.5
1956	2882	301	10.4	7.0	49.0	15.2	40.7	14.1	18.5
1961	3497	372	10.6	5.9	61.0	22.4	41.6	13.6	10.9
1966	4069	365	9.0	5.0	63.6	18.8	42.3	13.3	9.0
1970	4264	394	9.2	4.6	67.4	23.7	43.5	12.5	9.0

regarding the women in employment are (i) restriction on night work of women, so that with the introduction of multiple shifts and change over of shifts men workers had to be employed even in the occupations traditionally considered as women's, (ii) rationalization and introduction of new machines eliminating manual processes performed earlier by women, (iii) with the fixation of uniform minimum wages and standardisation of wages, some miscellaneous departments were closed down affecting a number of women workers, (iv) lack of systematic technical and vocational training and absence of on-job training facility for the women are the additional handicaps.³ All these factors restrict the entry of women into modernising sectors in the urban areas.

The job opportunities for women that have expanded in the last decade or two are mainly in the fields which demand certain amount of skill and considerable education. In industries like electronics, pharmaceuticals and in services and professions like education, health and in clerical occupations, the number of women in employment has increased. However, the unskilled women workers who do not find place in traditional occupations have very few openings in the organised sector. In fact the job opportunities in textile industry and in mines have been on the decline. As a result, vast number of women seeking work in manual occupations in urban areas can find work only in

the unorganised sector like bill industry, construction work, casual work and very importantly domestic service, while many have to remain out of employment.

In 1971 the percentage of women returned as in gainful employment was 13 per cent in the rural areas while it was only 6.6 per cent in the urban areas. In a metropolitan city like Calcutta only 4 per cent of the total women were in employment. The women were mainly working as domestic servant, prostitute, sweeper, washer women, hawker.⁴ In Bombay the working women constituted 7.7 per cent of the total female population. The occupations they were engaged in, in order of importance were work in textile industry, domestic service, bill-making, petty trade, unskilled work in factories.⁵

Women workers in Poona

The situation in Poona is not much different from that noted in Bombay, except for the fact that employment in textile and other industries is almost totally lacking so that nearly all the manual workers are employed in the unorganised sector. The trend in the employment of women in Poona over the last thirty years is examined with a view to assessing the changes in the employment situation.

The study of trend in employment of women in Poona is facilitated by the data available through the City Surveys carried out in Poona by the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics in 1937 and 1954.⁶ In 1954, nearly 75

per cent of the working women in Poona were occupied in manual work, primarily unskilled manual work (Table 1.3). The women engaged in petty trade like hawkers or petty vendors of vegetables, second-hand goods, etc. formed about 15 per cent of the total female earners. Thus almost 90 per cent of the women workers, were occupied in petty, unskilled jobs. Among the unskilled manual workers, the group of domestic servants - women engaged in cleaning utensils and washing clothes at a number of households every day made up about a third of the unskilled workers, followed by bidi workers working for small bidi manufacturers mostly under sweated conditions. The others worked as sweepers and scavengers, coolies and other sunnry workers, construction workers, servants in factories and workshops etc. The women in the artisan households like carpenters, handloom weavers helped the men in their artisan work and these formed about 12 per cent of the total female earners. Only about 10 per cent of the women workers were engaged in occupations involving some education; about three per cent were teachers in primary schools, two per cent nurses; two per cent clerks. Only in three per cent of the cases the women were holding jobs in high schools/colleges or administrative posts or working as doctors etc. The occupational distributions of working women noted in the surveys carried out in 1954 and in 1937 were almost identical except for the small increase in the number of women in

Table 1.3. Distribution of working women by occupational category in Poona city

Occupational category	Percentage distribution of working women	
	1936	1954
Domestic service	20.90	20.77
Servants in workshop	1.63	2.60
Bidi workers	13.66	14.66
Sweepers and scavengers	5.71	5.55
Construction workers	3.02	2.85
1. Total unskilled manual work	60.85	61.77
2. Skilled manual work	15.40	11.82
Dealers in secondhand goods	5.30	2.06
3. Small business	16.21	14.59
Teachers	3.47	2.78
Nurses	1.22	1.97
Clerks	.20	2.24
Middle and high salaried workers and Professionals	.71	2.67
4. Salaried and professionals	5.60	9.68
5. Others	1.94	2.14
Total	100.00	100.00

occupations like clerk, teachers, professionals. The rest continued to be occupied in the low paid, unskilled jobs.

The population of Poona City increased from 2.5 lakhs in 1931 to 6.00 lakhs in 1951. The number of female workers also increased but to a lesser extent. The number of working women per 100 workers men declined from 21 in 1937 to 18 in 1954. The number of women returned as unemployed worked out to about 9 per cent of the total working women in 1954. The entry into gainful employment seems to be getting difficult from the early 'fifties.

The comparison of the Survey data and the Census data⁷ posed some problems of definitions. Attempt is made to make the various occupational groups comparable as closely as possible. In 1961 it was noted that the proportion of domestic servants was about the same as noted earlier and that of bidi workers declined considerably. The proportion of workers in construction and sweepers and scavengers remained about the same. The proportion of women in petty trade also declined. There was a marked increase only in the case of workers occupied in domestic service, menial service in workshops etc. The household industry viz. hand-loom weaving, garment making, bricks and tiles, wood and cane production, perfumes and cosmetics, foodstuff etc. provided little scope for the new entrants. Teaching, clerical and other white collar occupations provided some new job opportunities. [These are, however, open only to

the educated class and the expansion of jobs in this category could be of little help to the vast majority of the women seeking work in the urban areas,

Between 1961 and 1971* a number of changes are observed in the occupational structure of the women workers in Poona (Table 1.4). The first noteworthy feature is a decline in the proportion of working women from 10 per cent to 7.4 per cent. The number of women engaged in trade and transport remained stagnant, those in construction work, in manufacturing and in various services recorded an increase but there was a sharp decline in the number of women occupied in household industry. The establishment of new factories in and around Poona during the 'sixties made for sizable expansion of industrial employment. However, the opportunities for employment of female workers had been quite limited confined mainly to electronics and pharmaceutical industry and packaging work in some industrial units. In other factories employment in menial jobs or coolie work is only available for women workers if illiterate and clerical jobs if educated. In the case of household industry there was a decline even in the number of male workers and the fall was sharper for female workers. The opportunities for employment for women workers are not growing despite the bustling and expanding industrial activity in the environs of Poona City. The number of

* Detailed industrial classification is not available for 1971 census. Hence, only a broad comparison is possible.

Table 1.4. Employment of women in urban areas of Poona district

Economic category	Female workers per 100 male workers		Percentage distribution of female workers in non-agricultural occupations	
	1961	1971	1961	1971
(a) Household industry	69	28	13.38	4.25
(b) Other than household industry	8	6	12.36	18.04
Construction	11	15	2.82	5.49
Trade and Commerce	12	8	11.69	10.90
Transport, storage, communications	9	8	6.65	6.03
Other services	21	21	53.10	55.29
Total	16	12	100 = 36888	100 = 41023

female workers declined from 16 per 100 male workers in 1961 to 12 per 100 male workers in 1971.

The number of female workers per 100 male workers was noted to be as high as 240 among bidi workers, 172 in domestic service, 79 in garbage and sewage disposal work and 27 in headload and handcart transport. In most of the other types of manual work, small trade, construction work it varied between 10 and 20. It was 65 in the case of teachers, 60 for nurses and other health and medical personnel, and around 15 in the white collar occupations. For educated women the important openings are teaching, nursing and health service, social service and clerical work. For the illiterate women who account for the majority of the job seekers the possible occupations are work as domestic servants, menial work in workshops, factories, sweepers, bidi workers, coolie, casual worker, construction workers, petty trader and hawker, prostitutes. In construction activity the workers from haddar community who specialise in some areas in construction work predominate. The opportunities for entry into a salaried job as a sweeper or in bidi work are noted to be quite limited. The only alternative is domestic service which is considered to be a last resort, because of the very low incomes and slavish human relations. There is little potential for expansion of employment in the type of hamaal work that the women do. The ratio of women to men working as

labourers in hamaal trade has declined over the last two decades.

Methodology of the Study

The range of activity included in the present study as hamaal work covers transport of various kinds of goods on head or in handcart from trucks, railway wagons to godown or from godowns to shops or from shops to individual customers' place. In addition the manual work of sorting, grading, weighing and arranging the goods is taken into consideration. The related activities of repair and maintenance of gunny sacks in which most of the goods transported are packed and the upkeep of the main godowns where bulk storage is made are also included in the study. The survey covered women hamaals working in five areas of Poona city where the work of unloading and transportation of goods is carried on; (i) The wholesale market in foodgrains and groceries localized in Bhavani, Mana, Ganesh wards in the central part of the City. (ii) Mahatma Phule Mandai or the central vegetable and fruit market located in the heart of the city where women work both for the vegetable traders in the work of unloading, weighments and transport and for the individual customers for carrying the purchased goods; (iii) the timber market located on the southern margin of the Central Business Area of the City. (iv) The goods yard at the Poona railway station where

women are employed to unload coal from the railway wagon and transport it to the godowns; (v) the women working at the Government grain godowns located in Shivajinagar ward. The hamaal women working in other trade centres of the city or in workshops etc. could not be covered because of the scattered locations of the places of work and the difficulty of identifying such places of work. The study was thus confined to the five main centres where most of the female hamaal workers work. A systematic sampling procedure could not be adopted for want of a master list of the workers and the difficulties of making a complete list. It was also noted in the pilot study that within a given area the inter-personal variations in relation to the major variables were quite limited so that a broad picture of the working, earning and living conditions could be constructed on the basis of the limited interviews completed in each of the work areas. In all 75 women hamaals working in different areas were covered in the study by personal interview.

To begin with, the organisers of the hamaal union known as the 'Hamaal Panchayat' were approached to contact the hamaal women. The Panchayat has membership among the male hamaals at the railway station, railway goods yard, Government godown and the whole foodgrains market. Women hamaals working in these areas are also members of the hamaal union. There is no organisation of the hamaals working in the Vegetable Market and the workers there were contacted through

the hamaal women interviewed earlier. Part of the interviews were conducted at the work place and part at the residence of the hamaal women. This gave an opportunity to observe the conditions of work as well as the housing conditions of the hamaal women.

The women occupied in hamaal work in the wholesale foodgrains market were approached through a women worker - an active member of the Hamaal Panchayat well-known among her co-workers. Most of the interviews were carried out in a temple in the market area. The women usually wait in the temple, till they are called for work. The interviews could be carried out during the afternoon when women still wait for work but are generally free. Most of the women working here live in the neighbourhood of this market area. It was possible to get in touch with some hamaal women who were residing in this locality and working in the Vegetable Market. Through them the other hamaal women working in the Vegetable Market could be contacted. The interview work, however, could not be carried out at the work-place in the Vegetable Market because of the objections raised by some of the dealers there. The women were therefore interviewed at their residence. For this, two slum areas, one at the foot of the Parvati hills and the other along the Poona-Satara road were visited. The visit had to be arranged in the evening when the women returned home from work. Some of the women were visited more than once for

in-depth interview.

In the railway Goode Yard, the women wait together outside the godown when there is no work. It was possible to obtain the interviews at the work place while the women were waiting for the arrival of a wagon. In the Government godown most of the interviews were carried at the work place; visit was also paid to the residential place in some cases. The field investigations were carried out over the period extending from 1st March 1976 to 15th May 1976.

The women contacted for the interview were generally quite friendly and cooperative. Particularly in the case of women who were members of the Hamaal Panchayat and were contacted through the organisers or other members of the Panchayat the response was good. Outright refusal for interview was rare. Only in the Timber Market it appeared that a combination of factors like fear of the employers, the extreme economic destitution went together to make the women workers suspicious of outsiders making enquiries. Some of the hamaal women there approached for the interview just ignored the queries. The women generally wanted to know the purpose of the interview and their main interest was 'will it enable us to get some other work, like work in factory or other fixed wage job'.

The women could supply information about their rural background, the reasons for migration, the entry into hamaal occupation, the working conditions, their family life and housing conditions. Quantitative information was

more hard to get. They did not know their exact age or the age of their husband and this had to be estimated on the basis of related information. The earnings on the previous day and the periodicity in work could be broadly assessed. The information about the amount of loan outstanding appeared at times only a guess and not dependable. Quantitative information like the earnings and income levels, age distribution etc. is presented in the report assuming that, in view of the broad homogeneity of the group in respect of these variables, the data obtained through the Survey would give a fairly representative picture of the economic and social conditions of the hamaal women. The broad quantitative estimates presented in the report are also useful to gauge the position of the group of hamaal women vis-a-vis the women working in other occupations in the unorganised sector in urban areas.

Besides the interviews with the hamaal women, discussions were held with some officials and activists of the Hamaal Panchayat, some male hamaals and some of the wives of the hamaals presently not in employment. The interviews of hamaal women were conducted on the basis of a structured questionnaire. The schedule, in many cases, served as a starting point for an informal talk. The study did not emphasise, and in view of the sampling problems and the problems in getting quantitative data could not really aim

at presenting a firm quantitative picture of the universe covered. The aim was to probe into questions like why the women moved from rural areas to the towns and the problems of absorption in urban occupations; The effect of this absorption on their mode of life, their attitudes and their level of living, the access to urban amenities and facilities, their utilisation of welfare facilities and awareness of urban institutions, the meaning of their moving into the urban environment by way of 'modernisation'. The move from the village has undoubtedly brought changes in their life. Attempt was made to explore what are the implications of such a change for the position and role of women in the economy. The in-depth case studies and the data obtained through the interviews helped to examine the above problems.

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CHAPTER II

M I G R A T I O N

Place of Origin

The hamaal women hailed largely from the rural areas in the neighbourhood of Poona City. Among the 65 total respondents for whom information about the place of origin could be obtained, 14 families were from Poona city itself - three 2nd generation migrants and eleven first generation migrants. In 52 cases the women hamaals shifted to Poona as autonomous or induced migrants sometime during the last 10 to 20 years. Ten families came from Haveli taluka, i.e. the surrounding rural areas of Poona city. Four families migrated from Velhe taluka when they lost their land due to submergence under the Panchet dam. They received some compensation for the submerged land and moved to Poona in search of work. In all 16 families migrated to Poona from villages from Mawal, Mulshi, Velhe and Bhor talukas of Poona district. This region is hilly with heavy rainfall where crops like paddy, ragi are grown only in the kharif season. The holdings are small so that it becomes more and more difficult to absorb the incremental working members in the family farm and consequently some of the working members have to leave the village. So also there were three agricultural labour families from Purandar and Indapur talukas of Poona district migrating to Poona due to lack of

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work in the village. Poona city, a hub of business and industry, is within 45 kilometers of these talukas. Migration in search of work to Poona is thus within their ken.

Migration particularly from the poor drought-prone areas of the State vis. Bhir, Sholapur and Osmanabad districts was reported, some of the families migrating during the 1971-73 drought period. In all 19 out of 66 families came from outside the Poona district, mainly from the south eastern districts of the State and only one came from Kolaba district (Map I). No case of migrants from outside the State was noted. The population under the study is wholly unskilled and illiterate; as such some information about the work openings and personal contacts are relatively easy within the district or a little beyond. Of the total 52 families coming from outside the Poona city, 33 came from Poona district itself.

Information about the place of residence before marriage and immediately after the marriage was available in the case of 40 families. In six cases the place of residence before and after the marriage was Poona city itself. In four cases the hamal woman and her husband came from the same village. The most numerous cases were of those married off in the nearby village within the same taluka; in five cases marriage in the village from an adjoining taluka vis. from Daund to Purandhar, or Mawal

to Haveli in Poona district, Karjat to Shrigonda in Ahmednagar district, etc. was noted. In seven cases the place of residence before and after the marriage was in the same district but not in the same taluka. Inter-district migration due to marriage was recorded only in two cases. In one case, the woman migrated on marriage from Sholapur district to Poona district and in other case from Poona district to Ahmednagar district and later on moved to Poona in search of work when her husband deserted her.

In the survey of working women which related to bidi workers, construction workers, sweepers and factory workers, conducted in 1960 in Poona,¹ it was noted that 50 per cent of the workers in manual jobs were non-migrants. Among the migrants 25 per cent came from Poona district, about 50 per cent from Western Maharashtra and Konkan area and the rest from outside the State. The construction workers from Wadar community was the major group coming from outside the State, vis. from Andhra Pradesh. Half of those who migrated, came to Poona on account of marriage, and another 25 per cent because the husband/father moved to Poona. The rest came to Poona in search of work after the death of their husband or due to economic problems in the village.

For the Poona city as a whole² it was noted that the proportion of migrants was about 50 per cent. The migrants from Poona district formed about 30 per cent of the total in-migrants, another 40 per cent came from other districts

of the State and about 30 per cent came from other States like U.P., Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala etc. Thus movement over a considerable distance is noted in the case of male migrants working in a variety of occupations, while in the case of women in unskilled manual work, the distance travelled is quite short.

The hamaal women came mostly from agriculturists' families. The father's occupation was reported to be cultivation of land in 32 cases and agricultural labour in 12 cases. In the case of 8 families the father was a hamaal or hand-cart puller in Poona, and in two cases a dealer in gunny-bags. Occupations like petty trade, running a tea shop, helper in a factory, tonga-driving, casual work were noted in two to three cases each. In three cases the father of the respondent had died in her infancy and the mother's occupation was domestic service in two cases and casual work in one case.

The main reason for migration was the pressure on land and unavailability of work in the village or landlessness - unemployment - starvation. This drives most of the illiterate, economically worst off families to a nearby city centre in search of work. The sheer desperation of the situation in the village where even casual or petty work is not available during the off season compels the workers to migrate either seasonally mainly to the sugarcane growing areas or to the city with a hope to make a living. On

migration, the type of occupations - casual work, domestic service, hamaal work or petty work like collecting rags, hawking etc. is the only resort for the economically lowest stratum of the population.

The move into the city was very often initiated by the principal breadwinner of the family who would come to the city in search of work and very often the family would continue to stay back in the village at least for some period. The women might later come to the city generally as the situation in the village worsens and try to get into urban employment. The women were themselves observed to have moved to the city as they became the principal breadwinners due to the death, desertion or ill-health of the husband. The process of the shift from the village to the city and the entry into urban occupation is illustrated in the following through a few detailed case studies.

The often reported cases were of the men who come to Poona and find work as hamaals but cannot afford to bring their families with them. If his family owns even a little land, his wife usually stays behind and works on it. Then it may be years before he can afford to bring her to the city.

Manjulabai

Manjulabai is the wife of such a hamaal. She now works in the Vegetable Market and lives in the sopadpatti on the Poona-Satara road. Her husband Shivaji is a hamaal who

works in Gul Alley in Bhawani ward, and has been working there since before they were married.

Shivaji's parents were landless labourers in Daund taluka of Poona district. Shivaji also worked as an agricultural labourer. When he was 22 he came to Poona - he had not married till then. Two years later he married Manjula, who was 10 years old at the time and lived with her parents in Khechare village, about 35 kilometers from Poona. Manjulabai's parents have a little land - and have to supplement their income by working as agricultural labourers.

This arrangement continued for 10 years. Shivaji would visit his wife occasionally, and after she was 15 or so, she would come to Poona every four or five months. Shivaji was living in a hut in a zopadpatti together with two other hamaals whose wives were not with them. During this period Manjulabai bore five children, of whom four are surviving.

Three years ago, conditions became too difficult in her parent's village - "I was starving," she said - and she came to Poona. The other two hamaals who were living with Shivaji moved out and Manjula and her four children then living, moved in. She found work in the Vegetable Market where several other women living in the same zopadpatti were going every day.

Manjulabai is now 32. Her husband is already an old

man, exhausted by over 20 years of hamaal work. He does not work regularly any more. Their son, who is just 16, has for the last three months been working in a hotel in Bombay. He sends home Rs. 20 a month. There are four other children in the family, including a baby.

Radhabai

Radhabai works in the Vegetable Market and we interviewed her in front of her home at the foot of the Parvati hill. We take this case study as an example where a woman has been the motivator for a number of families moving to Poona from the villages in the Mulshi taluka. She suggested that they should come to Poona since she could find for the woman some work in the Vegetable Market. She has so far helped three families, and in each of these families the woman is the principal earner.

Radhabai was married when she was about six years old, to a boy from her village who was 12 at the time. Her father was a peasant, with three acres of land. When her husband was 16 he was bitten by a snake; the wound never healed, and it became progressively more difficult for him to carry out his work as an agricultural worker. His parents were also poor peasants of the same economic level as Radhabai's parents. Radhabai worked on her in-laws' land after reaching puberty, as well as performing wage labour work to supplement their income. She bore two children, a girl and a boy. Meanwhile her husband's leg became

much worse and it was decided in 1956 to go to Poona to have it operated. They collected together some money and stayed in Poona with an acquaintance from a nearby village. A neighbour told Radhabai that she could find work in the Vegetable Market. She managed to find hamaal work for herself and the couple decided to stay on in Poona after Radhabai's husband's leg was amputated. This was in 1956; the couple has been staying in the same sopadpatti since then.

Radhabai's sister and her cousin (maternal aunt's daughter) were among the people who lost their land and homes in Panshet floods in 1961. At Radhabai's suggestion they moved with their families to Poona, and started working in the Vegetable Market - and have been working there since then. Radhabai's cousin's husband (who is educated upto the 7th standard) got a job in an oil mill and worked there for four years, when he lost the job, during a general retrenchment. Her sister's husband has never had a regular job in Poona. He just goes around looking for what he can get. Hence both these families are now dependent on the earnings of the women for whom Radhabai got jobs in the Vegetable Market.

Radhabai's niece was living in a village in Bhor taluka and her in-laws had one acre of land. Finding it impossible to subsist, she also came to Poona in 1962 with her family, at Radhabai's suggestion. Her husband works as a casual labourer on construction sites - he has not been able to

find any regular work, and his wife's earnings are the family's main income.

Radhabai's own husband, who is disabled by the loss of his legs, occasionally sews gunny-bags to supplement their income, and looks after his own and some of the other women's children when they are at work. Radhabai is the dominant member in the family as well as the main economic contributor.

All the families 'brought over' by Radhabai live in the same sopadpatti. Radhabai bore in all seven children, her eldest son died soon after they came to Poona. Her daughter's mother-in-law is also a woman working in the Vegetable Market and lives in the same sopadpatti.

Muktabai

One more case where the working woman was responsible for the migration of other families to Poona was recorded. Muktabai is now 41, and has a regular job with a firm that deals in gunny-bags which carry cement. She earns a fixed pay of Rs. 5.50 daily, including Sundays, and works a six-day week. She lives in a room in a chawl occupied by lower-middle-class tenants - her next door neighbour is a primary school teacher.

Muktabai was the child of peasant parents, owning about eight acres of land in Shirur taluka. She was married at the age of 13 to a widower with one child. She left him, however, after five years and came back to live with her parents with her only child, a son. She worked on her

parents' land for several years. Then some persons from the village whose families work in the gunny-bag trade, buying, selling and sewing the sacks, suggested that she could find work in Poona. She took up the suggestion because she felt that her son could get a better chance to be educated in Poona. She came to Poona with her brother in 1961. After she had found work with a gunny-bag firm, and started living with some of her village people doing the same work, her brother returned to the village.

After three years Muktabai moved into the chawl where she still lives. She persuaded her brother to come to Poona and helped him find a job in a small workshop manufacturing engineering parts. This brother had had a quarrel with his elder brother, who still held the land. Muktabai looked after him until he got married two years ago, and moved out.

Muktabai now pays Rs. 10 for her room, and Rs. 5 for the room next door, which is at present occupied by her sister, her husband and two children. This family also moved to Poona at her suggestion. Her sister's husband has a job in a cycle shop. Also living in Muktabai's room is her 'adopted brother', a man from her village, aged about 30, who also works in a small-scale engineering factory.

Muktabai today is a self-sufficient and independent woman. She is literate though she has had no formal schooling. She curses her job, the working condition and the

constant presence of cement dust - but welcomes the steady payment she gets from it. She has absorbed some middle-class values - she was concerned about the effect her job has had on her appearance, for instance. She feels she is in a fairly fortunate position and hence has persuaded two members of her family as well as her adopted brother, to take up work in Poona. They have been fortunate enough to find some work - all have had education at least upto the 6th standard.

In some cases, it was noted that the women's relatives - brother, mother - arranged for migration when faced with the problem of desertion or death of the husband it became impossible for the woman to sustain herself and the children on the meagre earnings which could be obtained in the village through seasonal work as agricultural labourer. Parvatibai came to Poona from Ahmednagar taluka with her brother ten years back when her husband deserted her on account of some quarrel. Her brother arranged to get her work in the Railway Goods Yard through some acquaintance and Parvatibai still works there and lives with her daughter in a hut in a gopadpatti near the railway station. It was her mother-in-law who fixed up work in the Timber Market for Sitabai when her husband who was a tonga driver died some 13 years back. Sitabai had five children, four daughters who are married now and one son who has recently started working in the Timber Market.

A few case-studies are cited above in detail with a view to throw light on some other points besides the actual causes of migration or the places of origin which could be numerically tabulated. The cases of women taking the initiative in moving, both themselves and related persons, and families, are interesting from the point of view of women's status. The often-stated opinion that women are conservative or reluctant to change, is negated in such cases. Also the problem of unemployment of men and women in the city is clearly illustrated. The hope that by moving into the city one improves one's chances of employment, educating and preparing the children for a better life, is present at first, and often negated by the experience in the city. The link with the village is maintained as long as there is benefit to either side, but some families after years in the city, gradually fall out of touch, especially if conditions in the city prohibit any saving and remittances to the village.

REFERENCES

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2. Poona: A Resurvey, op. cit.

CHAPTER III

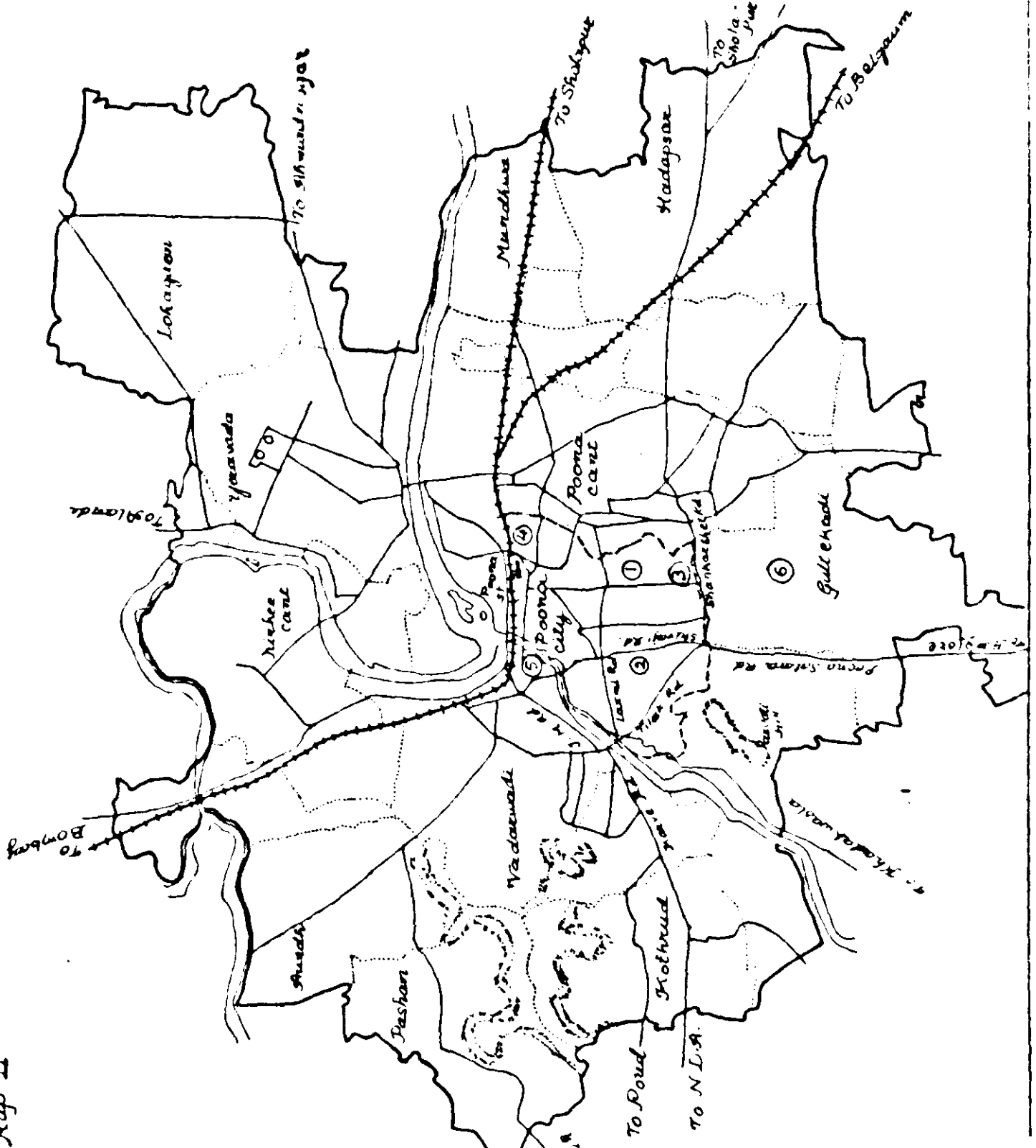
EMPLOYMENT AND CONDITIONS OF WORK

The hamaal women working at the five major centres in Bona city are covered in the present survey. The conditions of employment, the nature of work, the rates of payment differ from centre to centre as each centre deals with a particular type or class of commodities and the nature of hamaal work and related services needed at these centres vary considerably. So also the social organisation, and the problems of unionization differ from centre to centre. In this chapter the information relating to (a) the location of the centre and the type of commodities handled (b) the nature of hamaal work, the time schedule of work and the conditions of work, (c) places of residence in relation to the place of work, (d) unionization and the social organization within the group of hamaal women is presented separately for each centre.

The centres of hamaal work covered in the study (map II) are as follows:

- (1) The central wholesale foodgrains and groceries market (hereinafter referred to as the Grain Market)
- (2) The central vegetable and fruit market (hereinafter referred to as the Vegetable Market)
- (3) Timber Market
- (4) Railway Goods Yard

GREATER POONA



--- Poona City Boundary

— Major Roads

..... Ward Boundary

- ① Central wholesale foodgrains and groceries market in Ward, Shavani and Gan wards
- ② Central vegetable and fruit market in Shukrawar ward.
- ③ Timber Market.
- ④ Poona Railway Station Goods yard.
- ⑤ Government foodgrains godown in Shivajinagar ward
- ⑥ Agricultural Produce Market yard at Gullehad.

(5) Government Foodgrains Godown.

The Central Wholesale Foodgrains and Groceries Market

This market is, or has up till the present,^{*} been located in the Bhawani, Nana, Ganesh wards at the centre of Poona city. This is the largest single centre of hamaal work in Poona. Wholesale and semi-wholesale trade in cereals, pulses, jagvery, chillies, tamarind and other spices is localised in this area. According to the official records there are about 200 licensed commission agents and 750 wholesalers and semi-wholesalers operating in this market. The total annual turnover in 1975 according to the records of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee, Pune was about Rs. 400 million, 75 per cent of which was accounted for by foodgrains. The busy season starts around October when kharif produce begins to reach the market and lasts till about the month of May.

The main duties of the hamaals working in the wholesale market include unloading of goods from the lorries, weighing and stacking the bags in the godown, and delivery of the bags to the retailers and individual customers in other parts of Poona. Rates have been fixed by the Market Committee for different tasks as follows:

* See Note A on 'The Relocation of the Agricultural Produce Market in Poona' appended at the end of this chapter.

Unloading: 4 paise for 22 kg lump of jaggery or for each tin of oil.

9 paise per bag of foodgrain under 75 kg.

15 paise for every bag over 75 kg.

15 paise per basket of chillies.

Weighing: 25 paise per 3 lumps of jaggery.

12 paise per quintal sack of grain.

12 paise per basket of chillies.

Delivery: Rs. 8 per 5 quintals, 'depending on the distance'.

Rates for carrying within the area begin at 37 paise per 100 kg., and are fixed according to distance.

The above rates apply to the work which is done primarily by the male hamaals. The women mainly do the work of delivery of goods to the retailers, and unloading of some relatively lighter items, such as coconuts. The women are also employed to sort the unloaded produce and open and re-sew bags of grain when the goods are sampled. There is no standard rate of payment for these tasks, and the women's rate of payment is arrived at through an agreement with the retailers. The estimated number of women workers engaged in the work of carrying headloads or helping to pull hand-carts was about 50. Of these 17 women were interviewed.

The women usually come to the market centre at about 9 a.m. and are called for work as and when required. They remain in the market till about 7 in the evening. The

amount of work they secure varies from day to day and the work is relatively slack during the rainy season. Some of the women are in the employment of a particular wholesaler in the sense that they get preference when work is available. This arrangement does not, however, carry with it any guarantee of work being available. The majority of the women are entirely casual workers. They remain in the area for the entire day until a shopkeeper or an individual customer calls them for some task.

The women wait for work in the public street and there is no shelter from either sun or rain. On very hot afternoons or when it rains the women gather in the porch of a small temple; but here also they are depending on the whims of the temple priest.

The major problem for these women is the unreliability of employment. Their loads are lighter than those of the men, and because of the existence of considerable under-employment the physical strain of the work is relatively less. The maximum load carried by the women is 30 kilograms. The rate generally paid for carrying a headload from the wholesale market over a distance of about 1/2 kilometre is 30 paise. The earnings of the women during a good day in the busy season vary between Rs. 1.50 and Rs. 3. Women are on the lookout for work about 10 hours daily, but the number of hours of actual work are uncertain and variable. Consequently there are wide fluctuations in the day-to-day earnings.

Most of the women working in the wholesale market are of Maratha castes. Entry to work in this area is virtually barred to the members of the Scheduled Castes because it is foodgrains and other provisions, i.e. edibles, that are handled here.

All but two of the 17 women interviewed live within the three central wards where the Grain Market is located. Even the remaining two women live within easy walking distance (1/2 hour) of the work-place. One of these works only occasionally at carrying headloads; her main occupation is helping her husband with a handcart. The other woman who lives outside the immediate vicinity of the place of work has in fact moved her residence from there only four years ago, after being evicted by the landlord. The women working in this area are thus, residents of the same area. This means that they are able to keep an eye on their housework and children while waiting for work.

Membership of the union, that is, the Hamaal Panchayat,^{*} is more or less universal. However, union membership does not mean much to them. When asked how they had profited from membership, they spoke vaguely of increases in rates of payment, but added that there is little that a union can do in this occupation, as there is not enough work available

* See Note B on 'Hamaal Panchayat in Poona' appended at the end of this chapter.

to give them a living income. However, there is some sense of personal loyalty to the leader of the union and participation is through friendship and community feeling regarding the other women at work. One woman complained that although she always participated in the union's activities and gathered together the women from the surrounding blocks whenever asked to do so, the officials take no personal interest in her, and have ignored her request that they should find her daughter a job. The trade union membership is accepted largely with individual interest in view and awareness of the importance of collective effort for general improvement is lacking.

The women working in this area form a close-knit group, residing in the same area, some of them acquainted from their days in the village. They help each other with children, loans of ~~the~~ small sums of money or grain, housework when there are guests or illness in the family. In fact their community life closely resembles the life-pattern in a rural community. The relations with the employer also seem to be based on such ties. There are no contracts or fixed rates of payment, and neither is there any insistence on standards of work from the employer, mainly because of the nature of the work. The older women who receive preferential consideration, seemed to have cordial relations with their employers. However, there did not appear to be a practice of employers lending to the women or paying them

in kind. Payment is always in cash, and the employment is usually on a casual basis.

The Central Vegetable and Fruit Market

The Mahatma Phule Market located in the central part of the city is the main vegetable and fruit market of Poona. It was reported that in this market there are 450 licensed commission agents, dealing in onions and potatoes, fruit, and fresh vegetables; 150 wholesale purchasers, 90 of them local and 60 from market centres near Poona, who buy the produce here; 950 semi-wholesaler, and 1100 hawkers. About 600 male hamaals are employed to unload and weigh the produce. There are 50 hamaal women, most of whom work for the dealers in onions and potatoes. Besides, there are a number of women who help the hawkers and semi-wholesalers in fruit and vegetable to set up their stalls and those who carry loads for individual customers. Rates have been fixed only for the work in onions and potatoes. For this work the average daily earnings came to about Rs. 2 per worker. Some, though not all, of the women working for dealers get at the end of the day some of the unsold vegetables.

Work in this market is fairly steady throughout the year, since onions and potatoes are sold round-the-year, and some fruits and vegetables are always in season. In all 23 women were interviewed from this market, of whom 13 are employed by dealers, and 10 work casually for a number of

stallkeepers and their customers.

Work in the market begins at 4.30 a.m. and most of the produce has come in by 10 a.m. Thus the women's busiest hours of work are between 4.30 and 11.30 a.m. However, they usually remain in the market till 2 p.m. by which time the dealers have closed their accounts for the day and given the women their payment. Sometimes, when there are late arrivals, the women have to stay on till 5 or 6 p.m. They have no choice in this, either because their employers compel them to stay, or, in the case of casual workers, because they cannot afford to miss a little extra income. One woman, for instance, said that on the previous day she had earned Rs. 2.50 after a working day of over 12 hours.

Working conditions are not very unpleasant. The market stalls and the stone slabs where the produce is weighed are clean but damp. This continual working in damp or wet surroundings could be injurious to the health of women who are suffering from fever or joint pains, which is common among these women who cannot afford to lose a day's earnings because of minor ailments. There is a small restaurant outside the part of the market where they work, which the women patronise regularly for tea. The women do not, however, seem to make much use of the cheap meal services* provided in this market. This is probably partly because even these meals are not cheap enough, and partly because it is still

* One is organised by the Hamaal Panchayat and one by the INTUC.

not socially accepted for women to eat out, and in any case they have to cook meals for their families. Some of the women bring their children to work place, usually toddlers between two and five years old. Infants cannot be brought to work. Some have their daughters of nine or ten years come with them to help with the work of sorting.

Both the group of women who work regularly for one dealer and those who perform tasks on a casual basis for stallkeepers and private customers, have considerable fluctuations in their day-to-day earnings. The amount earned on any particular day depends on the volume of trade. The women who work for specific dealers are generally paid for the day's work every afternoon. Two workers reported that they are paid each Friday for the week's work. Both these had earned Rs. 15.00 on the previous Friday. The mean daily earning for this group was Rs. 2.00 and the range was from Rs. 1.00 to Rs. 3.00. For the second group, who are casual workers and are paid separately for each task performed, the mean was Rs. 1.50, and the range was from Rs. 1.00 to Rs. 2.50. The casual workers appear to be slightly worse off than the regularly employed women, mainly because the latter have a better chance of higher income on the occasion of brisk trade.

Of the 23 women interviewed from the Vegetable Market three live within 15 minutes' walking distance of the market, two in Vothrud ward about 5 kms from the market and the rest

were divided between two roadpattis situated along Satara Road and near Parvati Hill both about half an hours walk from the Market. As work in the market starts at 4.30 a.m. most of the women have to set for work long before it is light. Because of this they walk together in groups. Some told us that they had on occasion been assaulted or threatened while going to work. Although they said 'we can look after ourselves', they admitted that this would be nearly impossible if they had to go to work alone.

The women working in the Vegetable Market, as well as the male hamaals there, are not unionized. The officials of the Hamaal Panchayat, when asked why they have not succeeded in organising these hamaals, said 'the employers are too strong'. There was an attempt at organization some years back which was defeated through intimidation by the dealers, who are strongly united among themselves. The women were not able to say anything much about this state of affairs or whether they felt that a union would serve their interests. They said, however, that their situation had not improved much because of the fixing of rates for certain jobs by the Market Committee. In fact, the rates paid have gone up very slowly over the past 10 or 15 years so that in relation to the cost of living the conditions appear to have worsened over time.

The women working in the Vegetable Market are almost all Marathas; Scheduled Caste women are not taken in, in this

work either. The women have close community ties among themselves based on the common places of residence. Women working for the same employer do not always live in the same place, and the residential group is more close-knit than the work-group. In the residential group there are a few women who have been working in the market for a long time and have found jobs for a number of the others; they are regarded as leaders and are respected in the community. The employers work them quite hard and often treat them roughly. Relations with the employers do not appear to be as cordial as in the case of the women working in the Grain Market. However, the women are ready to speak for themselves and support each other when conflicts arise.

Timber Market

The trade in timber for purposes of building and carpentry is located in the southern part of Poona city in an area specially set out for that purpose. There are 122 timber merchants and saw mill owners here registered with the Poona Timber Merchants' and Saw Mill Owners' Association. They employ a total of 600 male hamaals, of whom between 300 and 350 are directly employed by the dealers to unload the wood arriving on trucks and to deliver it to the customers in other parts of the City and outside. The rest are casual workers, including some who make deliveries on their own handcarts or handcarts owned by the merchants; some who

deliver on their own bullock-carts; some who travel on trucks carrying timber to out-of-town customers in groups of five, to do the needed hamaal work on the site; and finally the women also pull handcarts themselves, or help their husbands with their handcarts. The number of women working here is about 30, of whom nine were interviewed.

The women come to a central square in the Timber Market area at about 9 a.m. and wait till they are called by a customer, remaining at this place till about 5.30 p.m. Here too there is no shelter for them or their children. In fact, the conditions are worse than those of the women working in the Grains Market, which is located in a built-up residential area, and where they at least have occasional access to the temple porch for shelter. Here also there is considerable underemployment; much of the day is spent in waiting for work. The work itself is physically tougher than that in the Grain or the Vegetable Market. The women who pull handcarts usually work in pairs and the weights they carry are quite heavy. The women here do appear to be tougher and used to this heavy work. As in the case of the hamaal women elsewhere, they have to go on working ignoring minor illnesses. Rate of infant mortality and miscarriage among these women appeared to be high.

The women have to bring even their very young infants to work-place because of the extreme poverty of their circumstances. The child is placed on a small sheet at the side

of the road and the other women keep an eye on the child when the mother is working. There are no public conveniences in the vicinity. There is no source of ^{re-} refreshment except some sugarcane juice stalls in the summer months. Sitting on the open road as they are, they are often harassed by the drunks who roam around the place.

The hamaals who are not attached to any shop, both male and female, are paid at rates fixed through bargaining with customers. Here there is no difference between the rates of payment given to men and women. Each woman's earnings on the day previous to the interview were recorded and amounts ranging from no earnings (2 cases) to Rs. 3 were reported. The average amount for the 9 women interviewed was Rs. 1.80. Moreover, all these interviews, were conducted in the month of May, which the women said was the brisk season. In other months incomes are even smaller than this.

Most of the hamaals working in this area live in one of two slums near the Shankar Sheth Road, which forms one boundary of the Timber Market area. Thus they do not have far to come for work. These slums are particularly insanitary and crowded, and shelter mostly casual workers together with some lumpen elements.

The conditions of the place of residence of the hamaal women working in the Timber Market tallied with the general impression we formed while interviewing the women. In their dress

and the undernourished appearance of the small children who were with them the signs of extreme poverty and destitution were clear. Of all the areas we visited, this was the only one where we met ^{with} lack of co-operation and even some hostility. There was little or no interest in the survey. The women did not ask us, as they did elsewhere, whether we would be able to find them better jobs.

Alcoholism among the men is widespread in this area; drunks are seen in this area even during the day time.

The Hamaal Panchayat is facing difficulties in consolidating a union in this area. They had built up membership of about 500 members after a strike action about 10 years ago, but now the number of members has fallen to 100 to 150. Seven out of 9 women interviewed were union members. Of the two non-members, one had been a member before but had left because 'it is of no use'; the other, a young woman in her twenties who pulls a handcart with her husband, said she knew nothing of a union. There have been some instances of strikes and other collective actions carried out by the hamaals working in the Timber Market. Some women, for example, said they had all been arrested about 5 years ago when they had blocked the road by lying down in the middle of it during a demand for higher wage rates. However, most of the women did not see any point in union membership.

The women working here come from the poorest stratum of the society and continue to live by and large in dire

poverty. They do not form close-knit groups as do the women in other areas. They co-operate only to the extent of looking after each others' children while waiting for work. One other feature of the group of women working here is that entry to this group is not restricted. However, the availability of work and the rates of earnings are both so poor that the newcomers do not find them remunerative and so restriction is unnecessary in this group. This group then perhaps represents the absolute borderline between the lowest paid forms of unskilled work available in the cities and ~~the~~ destitution.

Railway Goods Yard

Cement, fertilizers, grain and coal are the major commodities that arrive here on the railway wagons. They have to be unloaded and immediately taken away or stored in the godowns, in the railway yard. About 900 men work here as hamaals. Piece-rates have been fixed for handling various commodities through the efforts of the Hamaal Panchayat. Payment is made by the private traders who deal with the goods after they arrive, or by the transport agencies. Women are employed to unload coal, the lightest of these goods. The rate for handling coal is Rs. 24 per wagon. There are 22 women working here. They work as a team, sharing the work and the payment among themselves.

The women remain in the yard from 9 a.m. till 5 p.m.

waiting for the coal wagons to arrive. Sometimes the wagons arrive late in the evening, and they may have to work till 10 or 11 p.m. In any case, they remain in the yard from 9 a.m. till 4 p.m. even if there is no work. This is because there is not sufficient work available even for the 22 women who have secured since 1970 the exclusive right to this type of work. In fact the women dare not leave the coalyard for even a short time, for when a wagonload arrives it must be unloaded immediately and anyone who is absent would lose out on her share of the earnings. One woman said, "If I go home which is only a short distance away to feed my child or to visit the hospital, there is always some mix-up. Work arrives while we are gone and we miss out one day's earnings." Thus these women rarely take treatments for their ailments even though the main general hospital is very near the place of work. It also means that it is out of the question for them to take up any supplementary earning activity; after they get home from work and do the housework there is no time left.

The coal wagons are shunted into the yard behind the Poona railway station. Immediately behind the tracks are the godown buildings. The women wait on a ledge outside the godowns. Each wagon takes about an hour to unload, with eight women working on it. The team members divide up the work among themselves. Some climb on the wagons and shovel the coal down onto the ground; others stand below and

fill it into gunny-sacks, while the rest stitch up the sacks and carry them away. The wagons are dark inside, there are rats running around and the work of unloading stirs up a lot of coal-dust in the air. As a result of this, many of the women have opaque films over the pupils of their eyes. The environment is unhealthy, particularly at the height of summer and during the monsoon. There is no place to keep the children; the women put their children on the ledge or sit with them under empty wagons to get some shelter from sun and rain. One woman's child was killed in the yard because a weight fell on him while work was going on.

There is no fixed seasonal pattern of earnings in this activity; the work does not slacken much during the rainy season, though the conditions of work are particularly bad at this time. However, earnings are widely variable from day to day. Sometimes a number of consignments come in on one day, and the women can earn up to Rs. 5 each, after working up to midnight. On the other hand, during the period of the survey there were 15 consecutive days with no work at all. Usually the amount of goods arriving on one day would provide enough employment to earn Rs. 2 per person. This pattern indicates that these women's average monthly income will fall below the average amount viz. Rs. 50 earned by the women in the Grain and Vegetable Markets. From the point of view of both the amount and

the reliability of earnings, and working conditions, these women are the next worst-off after the women working in the Timber Market.

Of the 14 women interviewed, 9 live in the ropadpatti near the railway yard. Of the rest, 3 women who are related to each other live in the Waddarwadi, at an hour's walking distance and two live in Yeravda at about 45 minute's walking distance.

All the women in the group of 22 belong to the Hamaal Panchayat. Membership of the Panchayat is fairly general also among the male hamaals in the Railway Goods Yard. The women were enthusiastic about the Panchayat, and were aware that union action had won them some rise in rates and relative security of employment by closing entry to newcomers.

The hamaals have to deal with multiple agencies for fixation of wage rates. The usual system of payment is: The trader gives the hundiwala (agent of the trader) a commission and money separately for the hamaali. The hundiwala takes a cut out of the second amount and hands it to the truck driver. The truck driver in turn takes a cut out of it for himself and pays the hamaal what is left. This means that hamaal's struggle for higher wages meets the opposition of the traders, the transport agents and the truck drivers. The hamaals have struggled quite perseveringly to preserve their right to organise and to obtain at least a nominal fixing of rates. Once they struck work for

14 days. The women are quite militant and ready to join in the struggles of their male co-workers.

The women, who all described themselves as Buddhists, are also involved in some Dalit Organizations. They all attend Dr. Ambedkar birthday celebrations on 14th April. A sense of collective organization was apparent in this group of women workers. They are tied by their common place of residence, their work pattern in which the work load and the earnings are shared, and common involvement in Dalit Organizations. Nine out of the 14 women interviewed have husbands who are themselves hamaals - the highest proportion among the different groups covered in the Survey. All except a few older women in the Yard have found the work through a female acquaintance or a relative. In some families the mother-in-law has brought her eldest daughter-in-law to the Yard and she continues to work there after the former becomes old. In two cases the widowed or deserted daughters of the women working in the Yard have come back to live and work with their mothers. This pattern is reinforced by the closure of the gang to outsiders. This multiplicity of inner-group bonds, through the family, caste-group and caste organisations, union and shared economic life, makes this the most close-knit community among the various groups of hamaal women covered in the study.

Government Foodgrains Godown

The godowns located in the Shivajinagar Ward are used by the Government for the storage of foodgrains. The male hamaals unload the sacks from the trucks and pile them up in the godown in ceiling-high stacks. The women's job is to sweep out the godown buildings, keep a watch for leakages, salvage split grain and mend torn bags. The women working in the Godown are not engaged like the men in hamaal work proper but they form a part of the hamaal organisation and as such, it was decided to include them in the study.

Previously there were private contractors hiring out the services of the hamaals to the godown, but now the hamaals have formed a co-operative society, which secures them contracts and ensures better payment and more regular work. The men and women are both paid monthly wages. There are altogether 30 women working here, of whom ten were interviewed.

The women come to work at 8 a.m. but have no fixed time of release from work. They have to remain at the godown till 9 or 10 p.m. when there is some work to be done. The working environment is quite pleasant. The buildings are maintained in clean condition and are spacious and airy. There are no noxious elements unlike the Railway Goods Yard for example, where the coal-dust and fertiliser fumes are definitely injurious to the health. The women's work is

not heavy, though they are kept busy almost the whole day and their hours of work are unregulated. There is a canteen for the workers in the premises of the godown, which is also run by the co-operative society. The women patronise it for an occasional cup of tea during working hours. "The hamaals refer to the Godown at Shivajinagar as "Hamaals' America".¹

The earnings of the male hamaals in the Godown are still variable since the co-operative society merely acts as a contractor in their case and eliminates the profits of intermediaries. The women, however, are paid regular monthly wages for their cleaning and maintenance work. The monthly rate ranged from Rs. 200 to Rs. 290 for the women interviewed. The variation is based on the length of service and some differentiation of duties. The society also arranges for paid maternity leave, and interest-free loans which are repaid through deductions from the salary.

Membership of the Hamaal Panchayat is general among the women in this Godown. The women seem fairly satisfied with their conditions, which are certainly much better than those of any other group of women in our study. They consider themselves to be relatively privileged as compared to other women of their background and doing this type of work, rather than comparing themselves with women working in the 'organised' sector, to whom they are closer in their economic situation.

¹ Anil Awchat, Hamaals of Poona, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 11, No. 25, June 19, 1976, p. 897.

Only one of the women interviewed lives very near the Godown, in zopadpatti in Shivaji Nagar ward. The rest came mainly from the old parts of Poona city. Two women came from Yeravda ward which is almost at an hour's walking distance from the godown. They, however, reported that they regularly take a bus on one of the daily journeys. This job is well-paid enough to make it worth their while to come to work from a long way off. As the women come from widely scattered areas of Poona the type of community ties which in other groups are mainly founded on common groups of residence, are absent here.

Gunny-bag stitching

There is an estimated number of about 45-50 dealers in used gunny-sacks, who carry on their trade in the Sowwar and bhawani wards. They employ men as well as women. The number of men doing this type of work - mending and cleaning the sacks and tying them up in bundles for resale is about 300, and that of the women 50. This occupation is closely related to hamaal work and the workers in this occupation come from the same social background. For this reason, 6 women doing this type of work were included in the survey. The work goes on all round the year, since the use of gunny-sacks for various purposes is continual.

The women work from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. with one weekly holiday. The work is carried on the open road when it is

not raining, or in any otherwise unoccupied space within or between buildings. The 'workshops' are often dark, rat-infested and damp. Sewing the bags in semi-darkness causes considerable strain to the eyes. Also, the bags often contain substances like chillies, fertilizers or cement which are harmful to the eyes, and after continual exposure for a long period of time, injurious to the health. One woman, who is the sole employee of a man who trades in sacks used for transporting cement told us: "My work is really man's work. The bundles of sacks are heavy. I have to stack them up in the shed. I have to work in an atmosphere full of cement-dust. My clothes wear out very fast, and the dust settles on my hair and body, however, hard I try to cover them. It hurts the eyes also. In a few years I will not be able to thread the needle with which I sew these bags." She is 41, and has been doing similar work for different employers for 20 years. Most of the women similarly complained of unhealthy working conditions. One said that she falls ill every 2 or 3 months because of the damp atmosphere.

There is a standard rate of payment of Rs. 4 for 100 bags for the women, and Rs. 5 for 100 bags for the men, who do exactly the same work. But there is no guarantee that work will be available, and the average monthly earnings of the women fall well below Rs. 100. The woman who handles cement sacks, is an exception; she is paid at rate of

Rs. 5.50 a day including a paid holiday every Sunday.

Most of the women live very near the work-place. Some of the women interviewed living in Somwar Ward reported that they are able to go home when no work is available and be called from there when a job arrives, since they live practically next door to the workshop. Muslim women form a large proportion of the women doing this kind of work. It was reported to be a traditional occupation in some Muslim families, and also in some Scheduled Caste families, who form another major section of the workers here. Husband and wife often work for the same employer and their children play in the workshop when small, and are later put on to do the same type of work. There are a number of family groups working together in this trade. Usually the employees working for a specific dealer live in adjacent chawls or huts and thus form close-knit communities. Unlike the other areas studied, the women's work is not separated from the men's.

Membership of the Namaal Panchayat is general here, and it is through struggles led by the union that they have won the present rates of payment, which are now uniformly implemented. The men and women were quite enthusiastic about the union, and participate in its functioning, but complain that the nature and availability of the work is such that their conditions cannot be much improved.

Duration of Employment

It was noted that the hamaal women interviewed had by and large a long working life, 44 of them getting into gainful work before the age of twenty one and twelve of these who had crossed the age of 35 had been working for 25 years or more. Twenty seven women reported that they had been engaged in some gainful work since their childhood. In the villages they were giving a helping hand to the family in agricultural work; those in Poona reported that they helped their parents in hamaal work or worked in the family occupations of stitching and trading in gunny bags carried on by their parents. The age of joining gainful employment seems to have increased from about 12 to 14 years to 16 or 17 years in the last ten years or so. (Tables 3-1 and

The women who started working later than the age of 14 were classified by the reason for getting into hamaal work. In 13 cases they shifted from another gainful work mainly domestic service to hamaal work primarily because of the better earning prospects. The major reason for getting into employment particularly after the age of 30 or more was widowhood (nine cases) desertion by the husband (six cases) or unemployment of the husband (seven cases). Apart from this factor the need to supplement the family earnings due to the growth of the family either because of the need to support additional members in son's family or a deserted daughter with a child or two, or because of the rising cost

Table 3.1. Age at Entry into Gainful Employment of Hassal women covered in the Study

Present age	Age at Entry into Gainful Employment							Total
	-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36+	
	(No. of working women)							
18-22	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
23-27	-	7	2	2	-	-	-	11
28-32	2	4	5	6	3	-	-	20
33-37	-	4	5	5	3	1	-	18
38-42	-	3	3	1	1	1	1	10
43-47	1	3	2	-	1	1	1	8
48-52	2	-	-	-	-	1	2	5
Total	5	22	17	15	8	4	4	75

Table 3.2. Duration of employment for female women covered in the study

Present Age	no. of years in gainful employment													
	- 5		6-10		11-15		16-20		21-25		Above 30		Total	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	
18-22	1	21	1	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
23-27	2	24	7	16	2	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
28-32	4	26	6	21	5	17	4	12	1	10	-	-	-	20
33-37	1	31	4	28	9	20	3	16	1	13	-	-	-	18
38-42	1	40	3	29	-	-	2	20	4	16	-	-	-	10
43-47	-	-	2	37	2	32	-	-	1	20	4	13	-	9
48-52	-	-	-	-	3	37	-	-	-	-	2	10	-	5
Total	9	27	23	22	21	22	9	15	7	15	6	12	-	75

A = No. of cases

B = Average Age at Entry into Gainful Employment

of living was noted to be an important reason why the women joined gainful employment. General economic pressure was reported in eight cases and increasing family responsibility in ten cases.

The average No. of years spent in hamaal work came to about 12 years for the total women covered in the survey. The total number of years in gainful work in relation to the maximum working period possible in a particular case was noted to be on an average somewhat less in the case of women working in the Vegetable Market and the Grain Market as compared to those working in the Timber Market and Railway Goods Yard. The women in the latter case come from the most depressed and poor sections of the society and majority of them had been in employment all along, whereas in the case of the former the women largely came from cultivator families and some of them joined gainful employment when faced with distress situation like loss of the principal earner in the family.

Change in occupation

The job-spectrum over which these illiterate, unskilled women can move is quite limited. In all 24 women reported a previous job. In eleven cases the women worked, to start with as domestic servants. They moved to hamaal work because of the better income prospects. In one case domestic service was left due to rheumatic pains caused because of

constant work in water. One woman, earlier working on a construction site, complained of injuries to hand due to handling of cement and changed the occupation. Two women were engaged in making pellets of coal-dust and later joined as hamaals in Railway Goods Yard to improve their earnings. Sweeper, work in brick kiln, bidi-work, gardening, aya work and casual work were the other occupations noted. Seven women reported that from an early age they were helping their parents or their in-laws in agricultural work when in the village. Two women were earlier doing some sundry work in the Vegetable Market and got to know the dealers in the Market and through them secured hamaal work, which fetches relatively better income. Three reported to have secured the hamaal work through Hamaal Panchayat, and another four said that they just hunted for the work from place to place and did succeed in securing the hamaal work. Majority of the women working as hamaals entered into the occupation through a personal contact of either a relative - husband, brother, father, mother- or an acquaintance - mostly a woman hamaal.

NOTE A. THE RELOCATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE MARKET
IN POONA

The Agricultural Produce Market Committee, Pune is now in the process of implementing a scheme of shifting the wholesale trade in foodgrains, chillies, jaggery and other agricultural produce located since long in the central city wards to a location outside the main city area viz. Gultekadi ward on the southern outskirts of Poona. The dealers are allotted plots in the new market area in Gultekadi. The process of shifting was started in May 1976 with the relocation of some of the dealers in chilli and gur from Bhavani-Nana-Ganesh ward market area. The grain dealers from this area will be shifted during the year 1977-78. The wholesale trade in potato, onion and vegetables located today in the central vegetable and fruit market in the city is also being shifted and the process will be completed during the year 1977.

The Marketing Act has been put into force in Poona in 1976 regulating the trade in potato, onion, garlic, tamarind, gur, chilli, fruit etc. The schedule of payment of commission charges, the charges for weighment, and the rates of payment to hamaals for various tasks are specified for different items handled. A new system of payment is being introduced for the hamaals. The amounts earned by all the hamaals each day will be paid into a central pool and from this pool they will be

paid a regular

equally divided wage with some provisions for welfare and insurance benefits. The Hamal Panchayat is in favour of the proposed scheme. The women will be included in the scheme. However, it is feared that because of the shift to a relatively distant location the work of carrying headloads will be replaced by hand-cart or auto-carriage transportation and the women hamals presently working in the Grain Market are likely to lose their work. Part of the women working in the Vegetable Market may also face a loss of work. A few of them may find work in the maintenance and related work in the godowns. But a significant number of hamal women will be thrown out of the present hamal work due to the shift in the location of the market.

Note B. The Hamaal Panchayat in Poona

The Hamaal Panchayat is the only organization which has a substantial base among the hamaals of Poona. It will be relevant in this chapter on employment and working conditions to study the structure and functioning of the Panchayat and its history and the problems that appeared in the process of building up this organization. From this one may be able to throw some light on the specific problems of the workers in the 'unorganised' sector, and also specifically, the women workers in this sector.

History

It was reported that the call for a union of hamaals was first made by some workers in the Grains Market, after an incident when some of the hamaals were beaten by one of the trader-employers. Some of the hamaals saw the possibility of and need for organizing to collectively protect their interests. One of the original organizers told us: "The women sweepers working in this area - the employees of the Poona Municipal Corporation - had recently gone on strike and won their demand that they be provided with free working clothes (a blouse and a blue sari). We felt that, if even these women could get what they wanted by acting together, why not us?" This is in fact the approach they used when trying to collect together the hamaals in the beginning.

It was reported that the hamaals first approached some Congress leaders. The response was not very positive; it was felt that the employers were too strong, and the hamaals were too weak to hope for any success. They turned elsewhere and finally found a champion in a young freshly qualified doctor working for the Rashtra Seva Dal. The situation was discussed with the hamaals who had taken the initiative. After studying the problems involved a general meeting of the hamaals was called and the work of organisation was begun.

In those days the hamaals were not paid at any fixed rate for their work. They would get one, two or three paise or 'sometimes nothing' for unloading one sack of grain weighing one quintal. Thus the first demand of the hamaals was that the rate should be standardised at three paise per sack by all the traders in the market. They first sent a letter to the Traders' Association but the traders were not willing to negotiate. Then, in 1957 a strike was called which lasted seven days. Seven hundred hamaals participated as members of the organisation, and, besides, after the first two days of the strike most of the non-members also stopped work. The proportion of women among the hamaals was larger in those days, and they participated wholeheartedly in the strike. It was reported that some three hundred hamaals were arrested during this period when they obstructed a truck carrying outside labour that the traders had hired

in. The strike was partially successful, in that the demand for standard payment was met, but the Union was not accorded recognition by the Traders' Association.

This action also succeeded in gaining the support of the majority of the hamaals for the Union. But the traders retaliated by victimising some of the activists of the Union, refusing to give them any work. With the precarious economic conditions of these workers, this action attained its objective of slowing down the work of the organisation. There was an attempt at a retaliatory boycott on the traders taking such action; but a general slow down of activity from 1960-61 could not be prevented. From 1962 onwards some consolidation of the organisation in the Grain Market continued with some success. The organisation was extended to various other parts of Poona where hamaals are employed, mainly through a series of struggles.

Timber Market

The first organised action of the hamaals in this market was in 1966-67. The number of hamaals working there at that time numbered about 550 men and 50 women. In 1966 a Union was formed by another group (INTUC) with 200 members. They placed a demand for higher wages and when it was refused, called a strike. The leaders of the Hamaal Panchayat were called on to support the strike action. It was reported

that later the other leaders withdrew and the Hamaal Panchayat had to continue the strike. When a saw-mill owner started operating his unit with the help of outside labour, the hamaals organised a picket. It was reported that about three hundred hamaals were arrested and 36 of the hamaals were charged and taken to court. Some of the women we interviewed recalled this struggle. After this action the Hamaal Panchayat was able to increase their membership in the Timber Market. A membership of 500 was at least formally maintained for a number of years, though now it is less than 200.

The Hamaal Panchayat organisers are not satisfied with their own work in the Timber Market. Even when formal membership of the Hamaal Panchayat was almost total this group did not have the stability and sense of organisation which the formation of the Hamaal Panchayat brought to the hamaals in the Grain Market. When we asked a veteran organiser what might be the reasons for this, he suggested the following. First of all, the saw-mill owners employ both skilled workers for cutting the wood, etc. and unskilled hamaals. There is some antagonism between these two groups of workers which is exploited by the employers. During the struggle of 1966-67 the hamaals were not backed by the skilled workers. Partly because of this, and partly because of the nature of the trade and the work of the hamaals, the latter

do not have as much economic bargaining power as the hamaals in the Grain Market. A strike of hamaals can totally paralyse activity in the Grain Market - whereas the saw-mill owners can carry on their business with stacked wood, and customers can arrange for their own transport. The economic weakness of the hamaals makes them more susceptible; some of them could be bought off by the employers. As a result they tend to remain divided.

Railway Goods Yard

Today a total of about 900 hamaals work in the Railway Goods Yard. In 1970-71 the Hamaal Panchayat organised a strike to get recognition to the Union and fixed wage rates. The traders threatened to bring 500 labourers from outside to break the strike. It was reported that a truckload of 100 men was brought in. However, the hamaals refused to be intimidated, and despite some violent clashes the Yard remained closed for 7 days. The hamaals won a 25% increase in the rate. In this work place the Union has maintained a high degree of unity and organisational strength since this big struggle five years ago.

The situation of the hamaals in the Railway Yard is similar to that of the hamaals in the Timber Market in some respects. Here too a large proportion of the hamaals is from the Scheduled Castes and they live together in the slum areas. The employers-traders and transport agents

and truck drivers - are numerous but act collectively. However, the volume and the nature of traffic in the Goods Yard make the hamaals indispensable to the functioning of the trade. Such is not the case in the Timber Market. Thus the hamaals working in the Goods Yard have greater bargaining power. The success of the action of 1970 has probably demonstrated the need for and the power of collective action and the hamaals remain well-united to-date.

Government Grain Godown

Until 1970 the hamaals had been employed through a system of inviting tenders when labour was required. In 1970 the Hamaal Panchayat organised about 800 hamaals into a cooperative society and demanded that contracts should henceforth be issued only through the Society. About seven hundred hamaals participated in a satyagraha organized to press the demand. It was reported that there was a lathi-charge and later, when the Chief Minister came to the Godown to open a new housing project, the hamaals went on a march with their hands tied, to protest against the police lathi action on peaceful demonstrators. Fifteen hundred hamaals from all over Poona reportedly participated in this demonstration. The struggle was successful. Now the hamaals are employed through the Society and they are ensured some security of employment.

The Hamaal Panchayat did make some attempt to unionise

the workers in the Vegetable Market but failed, mainly because of the strong opposition from the dealers in the Market.

It was reported that the Poona Hamaal Panchayat had taken a lead in formulating and demanding the implementation of the Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and other Manual Workers Act so as to ensure some regulation of the employment of hamaals viz. terms and conditions of employment including rates of wages, hours of work, maternity benefit, over-time payment, leave with wages, weekly and other holidays, provision of health and safety measures at the place of work, etc.

The proposal was first put forward at a conference held in 1963, in which hamaals from Kolhapur, Bombay, Sangli, Satara, Dhulia, Nagpur and Poona participated. The Act was passed in 1969. It has been implemented only in Bombay, on an experimental basis. The employers claim that there should be a minimum of 10,000 hamaals to make this an economic proposition. They have obtained a stay order postponing implementation of the Act in Poona. The implementation of the Act is a major current demand of the Hamaal Panchayat.

Structure

For membership of Hamaal Panchayat entrance fee of Rs. 1/- and an annual subscription of Rs. 3/- is charged. New members are taken on only in the busy season, as the

Panchayat has the responsibility of ensuring employment for the members. Weekly meetings of the representatives of hamaals from all the different parts of Poona are regularly held.

The main office of the Panchayat is in the Grain Market area in Bhawani Ward. There are also branches in the Railway Goods Yard and the Government Godown, and there is an office of the Hamaal Cooperative Society in the Grain Market. Among the office personnel are activists of the Socialist Party and some hamaals. An ex-hamaal looks after the working of the cooperative society in the Grain Market. Decisions are taken in the weekly meetings, and, are conveyed fully to the rank and file.

In other words, the functioning of the Union is fairly democratic and this itself has contributed to the education of the hamaals. For example, the Union has been able to bring about some restrictions in the consumption of alcohol where the Union is strong. As one activist told us, most of the hamaals are liquor addicts. But now in the Grains Market one seldom comes across drunks during the working hours.

The Hamaal Panchayat has recently started a cheap meal service for the benefit of the hamaals. Millet breads and a side dish are provided on no-profit-no-loss basis. The food is prepared in a kitchen behind the Bhawani Peth office and sold at three centres in Poona. The kitchen provides employment for some 20 or 25 women, mainly the wives of

hamaals. The Panchayat maintains a "Bhau Bhet Fund", with each member contributing Rs. 2/- per year. Arrangements to provide a set of saree-choli to the wife and to meet some educational expenses of the children of the deceased hamaal member of the Panchayat are made through this fund.

Women in the Hamaal Panchayat

Participation of women in the Hamaal Panchayat has been general since its establishment in the various areas. In fact the proportion of women participants has fallen in the last four years only because of the decreasing employment of women. They have taken part in the various strikes and satyagrahas wherever these have been organised. However, women's participation in day-to-day activities and decision making in the Union is rather weak - so that the democratic educational effect of unionization is not marked among them. Except for the women in the Railway Goods Yard who have won the right to restrict entry the Union has not taken up any specific demands of the women. The implementation of Mathadi Act for which the hamaals are at present struggling, will not help the women whose major problem is lack of work. The Union cannot see any way to revert or halt the probable future development which is likely to cause retrenchment of even the women who are presently employed in the hamaal work.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROFILE

The universes covered in the present study is distinct in many respects. The study relates to a specific section of working women in Poona, women working as hamaals. The women earners form 55 per cent of the total earners in the 75 families covered in the study. In the survey carried out in Poona in 1954, it was noted that in coolie and allied work female workers constituted about 30 per cent of the total earners. Women workers accounted for 35 per cent of the total workers occupied in unskilled manual work.¹ When all the occupations were considered together, women workers formed only 15 per cent of the total workers. The corresponding proportion noted in the Census of 1971 was 12 per cent.²

There were 350 persons in the 75 families covered in the study. Of these 113 were female adults, 99 male adults, 70 female non-adults and 63 male non-adults. The average family size came to 4.67 (Table 4.1) and the median family size was 4.5 persons. The family size broadly varied within the limits of two to eight persons. There were only four cases of single person units and in one case the family size was nine. The average family size for the total population of Poona came to 5.23 persons as per 1971 census. The earners formed 29 per cent of the total population and the number of dependents per earner was 2.4.

The proportion of earners in the resurvey of Poona was noted to be 31 per cent and the earners-dependent ratio was 1:2.2.³ Among the hamaal women families covered in the present study the earners constituted as many as 39 per cent of the total population; correspondingly the dependency ratio was lower. There were 1.6 dependents per earner.

The group differs from the general population in respect to the composition of the family (Table 4.2). Uninuclear units with female heads formed about five per cent of the total families. Couples with/without children and with or without other relatives with male head formed about 73 per cent of the total families in the general population, while they accounted for about 60 per cent of the families in the group of hamaal women covered in the present study. In about a third of the families the working woman was the head of the family living generally with her children.

Marital Status

All the 75 hamaal women included in the study were married women but 25 of them had lost their husband. Even in the case of married women living with their husband the working woman was the bread winner in seven cases. In four families the husband was unemployed; in two cases an unskilled job in a factory was lost, in one case due to closure of the unit and in the other due to retrenchment and the man failed

Table 4.1. Distribution of the surveyed families by family size and No. of earners

Total No. of persons per family	No. of earners per family			Total
	1	2	3	
	No. of families			
1	4	-	-	4
2	5	5	-	10
3	4	1	-	5
4	5	6	2	13
5	3	8	4	15
6	2	10	2	14
7	2	10	1	13
9	-	-	1	1
Total	25	40	10	75

Table 4.2. Distribution of surveyed families by family type

Family Type	Marital status of the Hamaal Women			
	Married	widowed	Deserted	Total
	---- No. of families ----			
I	1*	2	1	4
II	33	-	-	33
III	7	-	-	7
IV	5	-	2**	7
V	2***	6	2	10
VI	-	10	1	11
VII	-	1	2	3
Total	43	19	8	75

* Husband at Lonavala.

** In two cases the husband has remarried and lives in the same place, but does not support the 1st wife.

*** Husband at Bombay.

I = Unisember. II = Self + husband with or without children.

III = Self + husband + son + his wife and with or without children.

IV = Self + husband + other relatives with or without children.

V = Self + Children. VI = Self + son + his wife and with or without children.

VII = Self + children + other relatives .

to secure gainful employment after the loss of the earlier job. Another earner working as a carpenter reported that he was unable to secure any work. Lack of work was also reported by a casual worker. The husband in one family had lost his leg and was disabled, inability to do heavy manual work due to age (about 55 years, was reported in two cases and the husband was suffering from ill-health in one case. In three cases the husband was not residing in Poona, two were working in Bombay and one in Lonavala and they were not supporting their wife and family staying in Poona.

The husband had taken another wife in two cases and even though living under the same roof, the working women had to support themselves. One woman aged 35 did not have any issue and the husband had taken a second wife. In the second case the woman aged 30 had two children who died in infancy. The woman was living with her husband together with his second wife, her sister. She had to manage her own affairs and did not receive any financial support from her husband, the second wife was not working.

There were six cases where the husband had deserted the wife for a variety of reasons. In one case the woman past 40 years of age was childless and was deserted, some 15 years back and she is living alone in Poona. In another case the husband deserted the wife some ten years back, when she was 30; she had then a daughter aged five and her son had died in infancy. She came to Poona with her brother and got into hawal work in the vegetable market. Now she lives with

her only daughter. In three cases, the women are around thirty years of age and have living children, both sons and daughters. In one case the woman left her husband who had a regular job and took the responsibility of supporting her three children under 10, giving 'quarrel' as the reason for leaving her husband. In other case the woman had three sons and two daughters. The husband left the family last years. He was a craftsman. He incurred some loss in his trade and got into debts. It was reported that he absconded due to financial problems and the wife was left to look after herself and the five children and had had a very hard time. Another woman aged 20 with one son is living with her mother now because her husband drinks and ill-treats her.

There were 19 women who were widows. In nine cases the husbands were hamaals. Those who lost their husbands later in the life mainly because of the hard nature of hamaal work often in hazardous conditions handling coal, cement etc. were forced to take up hamaal work after the age of 35 or so.

There were two cases of widow remarriage. One is a woman under 30 who had no children from her first marriage and married again 2 years after she was widowed. The other is a woman of 40 who had married only recently. She has three children from her first marriage, one daughter is already married and two sons - one aged 16 does some casual work and another now 11 goes in school. The woman works in the Vegetable Market and her husband is a hamaal in the

Brain market.

There are no social or religious restrictions on widow-re-marriage in the communities - mostly Marathas and scheduled castes to which the hazaar women belong. When asked why re-marriage is not frequent the women said emphatically that they did not wish to re-marry "who wants the headache of child birth every year and you can never rely on the man to keep on bringing money home; it is best to be on one's own."

On the whole neither widowhood nor desertion is considered a calamity. Some of the women we interviewed expressed a cynical view about the prospects of their married daughters. A woman from Ganesh Petha who had recently married her daughter to a boy from Bombay, with a regular job in the post office expressed - "Time will only show whether he looks after her or not. Her elder sister returned to stay with me after two years. Anyway, I have done my duty by marrying the younger one now." Marry they must and at an early age, that is the social more. However, the husbands are not dependable and the women have often to take on them the entire family responsibility.

Age distribution and age at marriage

It was difficult to get the information relating to the age of the working women. The age was computed generally on the basis of the information relating to the number of children and their approximate age. The age at marriage

was calculated on the basis of information about the approximate time gap between the time of marriage and the age of puberty. The women covered in the Study were concentrated mainly between the ages of 20 and 45 years (Table 4.3). Considering the arduous and hard nature of the work this seems to be the proper span for this type of work. The reported age was around 50 only in three cases. The younger girls were at times accompanying their mothers to give a helping hand. However, they were not working on their own before the age of 20/22. The median age for this group of haasal women came to 35 years. For the blue collar workers covered in the study of working women in Poona in 1960,⁴ the median age worked out to be 32 years while in a recent study carried out in Poona relating to the women dealers in old tins and bottles the median age was found to be 33 years.⁵

The women were married at an early age; the age at marriage generally ranged between 8 and 13 years. There were only two cases of marriage after the age of 15. Marriage at the age of 6-7 was reported in seven cases and in one case the girl was reportedly married at the age of about three years. The mother had lost a number of children and was advised by a local elder to get the girl married in infancy; the child was married to a boy aged seven. The girls often stayed with their parents till the age of 11 or 12 and went to the in-laws place on reaching puberty. The mean age at marriage came to about 11 years. It was

Table 4.3. Age distribution and the age at marriage of the hamaal women surveyed

Age group	Age at marriage			Total
	Upto 7	8-13	14-18	
19-22	-	2	-	2
23-27	1	7	3	11
28-32	1	13	6	20
33-37	2	11	5	18
38-42	1	7	2	10
43-47	2	4	3	9
48-52	1	3	1	5
Total	8	47	20	75

Table 4.4. Distribution of hamaal women surveyed by age and no. of living children

Age group	No. of living children								
	Nil	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
	No. of cases								
19-22	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
23-27	2	-	-	3	3	3	-	-	11
28-32	5	1	4	2	3	4	-	1	20
33-37	1	3	1	4	5	2	1	1	18
38-42	2	2	-	2	2	-	1	1	10
43-47	1	1	2	2	-	1	-	2	9
48-52	-	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	5
Total	11	10	9	14	14	10	2	5	75

noted that there was little difference in the age at marriage for women in the age group of 40+ and in the younger age groups. The average age at marriage of women who were born and brought up in Poona and the first-generation migrants from the village was noted to be nearly the same.

The daughters of the working women were getting married around the age of 13 to 16. There were only a few families where daughters of age 17 or 18 were still unmarried. The women respondents said that 'In our community, if a girl is unmarried and is grown up the people call her names.' Often the marriage is arranged with a close relative e.g. father's sister's son. The age difference between the husband and wife ranged generally between seven to ten years.

No. of children

The number of children born varied between one and thirteen. There were 9 women without any issue. The spacing between children normally varied between 1.5 to 3 years. The average number of children born worked to four; twenty five percent of the children born were not living. Incidence of infant mortality was quite high. Death of children at a later age was reported only in some cases, the causes being some epidemic, jaundice, typhoid, etc. The number of living children ranged from zero to seven (Table 4.4). The average number of living children came to three per family. The older women had borne on an average more

children, but the rate of mortality being also higher, the number of surviving children was somewhat smaller in their case (Table 4.5).

Some of the extreme cases of high number of child-births and infant mortality may be cited: (a) A woman aged 65, had borne eleven children, nine of whom died in infancy and one boy died at the age of 13 after falling into a local canal and only one son survives. (b) A woman of over 50, bore in all 14 children; of these five daughters who are now married and one son aged 30 survived.

It was reported in six cases that the women who were in their thirties had undergone tubectomy operations. They found it a welcome release after having had three to four children and five to seven pregnancies.

Education

Nearly all the women hamals interviewed were illiterate. Only six out of 75 had attended school, and that too only for 2 or 3 years. Out of the husbands of the women twenty had attended school for some years; four each reported schooling upto 2nd, 3rd and 4th standard respectively, two each upto 5th, 6th and 7th standard and only two reached the 9th standard. The picture is considerably better if the education of the children of the hamal women is examined. It was noted that in 13 families the children were not attending school, 11 boys and 13 girls were, thus, not receiving any education. In the case of boys

Table 4.5. Average No. of children born and No. of children living for surveyed families

Age group	No. of cases	Average No. of children born	Average No. of living children	Percent of children surviving to No. of children born
15-22	2	1.5	1.5	100
23-27	9	4.6	4.0	88
28-32	15	3.7	3.4	91
33-37	17	4.7	3.5	75
38-42	9	4.3	3.2	74
43-47	8	6.1	3.7	61
48-52	9	6.8	2.2	32
All age groups	66	4.6	3.4	73

* 9 cases without any issue.

Table 4.6. Level of education among the children of hamaal women surveyed

	For children not attending school		Children between 6-16 attending school	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	---- No. of children ----			
No education standard	4	10	11	18
1	-	2	3	2
2	2	1	5	3
3	-	2	5	6
4	2	2	4	5
5	1	1	2	2
6	3	1	1	2
7	2	-	2	2
8	3	-	4	1
9	1	-	1	1
10	-	2	1	1
Matric/III	1	1	1	-
Total	19	22	40	43

the reasons given were, the boy could not make any progress or that he could not be made to attend the school. The education of girls was less regular and got hampered mainly because of the domestic responsibilities; the distribution of the educands and those who had some schooling but were not attending school now is given in Table 4.6.

Children joined the school at the age of 6 or 7 and the progress in the school was noted to be uneven. A child of 10 may be found in the 2nd standard on the one hand or he may progress well and attend 8th standard at the age of 14. Some attended the school for a few years and discontinued education.

Of the total sons in the age group 6 to 16 nearly 75 were attending school or had some schooling; the corresponding proportion among the daughters was about 55 per cent. Information about the education of the married daughters was not available. Among the sons who were not attending school, a quarter had education upto 4th or 5th standard, about 50 per cent upto 8th standard and the rest beyond that. Among these, there were 4 cases where the boys completed the education upto matriculation and one boy completed the III course. One girl had appeared for matriculation examination and two had completed their education upto 10th standard. The prevalent feeling among the women was that their children should be able to do some better work than hamaali and tried to educate their children.

One woman, a widow since 3 years ago, reported that she was working as a hamaal in the Vegetable Market to enable her daughter (and only child) to complete her matriculation and the girl had just finished her examination when we met her.*

Earners

In 50 per cent of the families covered in the study the working woman was the principal earner. In half of these cases they were receiving a helping hand from their sons who were engaged in odd jobs in hotel, gural, hamaal work or some casual work. There were working sons in the family in 19 cases. (Table 1.7)

In 31 cases both the husband and wife were gainfully occupied; and in three cases, a brother, husband's father, or sister's husband were the additional working members in the family. The husband was occupied in hamaal work in 16 cases and in three cases he was operating a handcart. The other occupations reported in the case of husbands were

* This had meant a lot of hardship in these three years for the mother. She had not been working before her husband died. He was a carpenter, and managed to earn enough to support the family, though not to save anything. When he died after a brief illness, Krishnabai determined to see her daughter through her matriculation to prospects of a better life, and, at the suggestion of some of her neighbours in the Satara road spadpatti, went to work in the Vegetable Market. She also spared the girl of domestic responsibilities during her final year. The girl studied by the light of an oil lamp at nights and, we later heard, passed the examination. But her chances of getting a job are slight. These days she helps her mother in the house a little, and Krishnabai continues to work in the Vegetable Market.

Table 4.7. Distribution of surveyed families by earner status

Earner status	Marital status of the Hamaal women			Total
	Married	Widowed	Deserted	
	---- No. of families ----			
Sole earner	10	9	6	25
Self and Husband	28	-	-	28
Self and son	1	10	1	12
Self + Husband + son	7	-	-	7
Self + Husband + Others	2	-	1	3
Total	48	19	8	75

bus-driver, riksha driver, work in the factory, work in the press, carpenter, fitter, assistant to painter, supervisor, work in a shop or a restaurant.

The hamaal women were the sole earners in the case of 25 families. This works to 33 per cent of the total families. In the study of working women carried out in Poona in 1960⁶ it was observed that the working women were the sole earners respectively in 22 per cent, 25.6 per cent and 44 per cent of the cases among the bidi workers, sweepers and workers in the factory. The percentage for hamaal women is higher than that noted for the first two sections whose earnings are comparable. The percentage appears to be considerably higher among the women working in the factory. This may be partly because some of the factories make it a policy to employ widows and deserted women. This saves them from giving maternity leave and other benefits to the women workers.

Income Level

It was difficult to arrive at the estimate of the income of the working women, because of the day-to-day fluctuations in the quantum of work available in the Railway Goods Yard, Timber Market and the Grain Market. There were in addition seasonal variations, monsoon being generally a slack season. The interviews were conducted during the summer months, when the work availability could be considered

to be normal. The women could give information about the earnings for the past few days and broadly indicate the work availability in the last four weeks or so. On this basis the estimated monthly earnings are computed. Even though the estimates are tentative and crude, they are presented to get a broad picture of the levels of earnings. The daily earnings ranged from about Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 3 in most of the cases. Only in certain types of works like stitching gunny bags earnings upto Rs. 4 per day were noted. In Government godown, the women have steady employment and earn as much as Rs. 200 to Rs. 250 per month on a regular basis. In other cases the earnings are uncertain and variable. The estimated monthly earnings ranged from about Rs. 40 to Rs. 120 with the median earnings coming to about Rs. 60 per month. There were other earning members in many families. It was possible to get information about the approximate earnings of the sons, husbands, when they had relatively regular work. For those occupied in casual work, the estimation of earnings was a very rough approximation. There were a few cases where the husbands were getting a steady income as they were working as bus driver (2 cases), supervisor at work site, in factory (2 cases) and in press (2 cases). In one case the son was in a manual job in the railways, and in another case in Post and Telegraph Department.

The women workers formed 55 per cent of the total workers and accounted for about 40 per cent of the total

earnings, the husbands forming 27 per cent of the earners, contributed to the extent of 40 per cent to the total earnings. The other earners, mainly sons, had a share of about 20 per cent in the earnings. The average monthly income worked out to Rs. 40 per person or Rs. 51 per adult unit. Monthly income per adult unit was computed for different family size groups (Table 4.8).

Barring the cases of two-person family units, where both the husband and wife were working (five cases) and did not have any additional responsibility, the average income per adult unit does not vary considerably in the different family size groups. In larger families the number of working members is mostly two or more. In certain cases where a single earner was supporting 5 to 6 dependents, monthly income of as low as Rs. 10-15 per adult unit was noted. However, the monthly income per adult unit generally ranged between Rs. 25 and Rs. 45. Among the 75 families covered in the study there were 13 families with monthly income per adult unit below Rs. 25, in 15 cases it varied between Rs. 25 and 35 and in 12 cases between Rs. 35 and Rs. 45. If the line of destitution is put at Rs. 45 per month per adult unit, in 55 per cent of the cases the families were living below the line of destitution. If the necessary minimum is placed

* The desirable national minimum per capita expenditure was put at Rs. 20 per month (at 1960-61 prices) by the Study Group set up by the Government of India in 1962. In view of the substantial rise in the prices, the minimum in 1975 is set at Rs. 60 per month per adult unit and a level 75% below this limit is considered as the line of destitution.

Table 4.3. Monthly income per adult unit by family size

Family size (No. of persons)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
No. of families	4	10	5	13	15	14	13	1
Monthly income per adult unit (Rs.)	60	75	38	47	48	52	43	61

at Rs. 60 per month per adult unit 73 per cent of the families were at or below this level. Considering a parallel level of income in 1954, it was noted that about 67 per cent of the families had less than the minimum necessary income in the case of families where the female earners were engaged in coolie and other sundry work. The corresponding proportion for the domestic servants was 82 per cent.

Some data collected in the recent period for the working women in other occupations may be cited. In a study of women engaged in hand-embroidery work in Lucknow it was found that in 73.5 per cent of the cases the monthly per capita income was below Rs. 40 and in another 15 per cent of the cases it was between Rs. 40 and 60.⁷ For women construction workers in Bihar the per capita monthly income was below Rs. 40 in 62 per cent of the sample families.⁸ The incomes were noted to be relatively higher in Delhi where the per capita monthly income was below Rs. 75 in only 45 per cent of the cases.⁹ In a study of women hand-cart pullers in Ahmedabad, it was noted that in 49 per cent of the cases the women earned less than Rs. 3 per day.¹⁰ The estimated average monthly per capita income was put at Rs. 42 in the survey of women dealing in old tins and bottles¹¹ recently carried out in Poona.

In a study conducted in Poona in 1975¹² the estimated average earnings of domestic workers were put between Rs. 40 and Rs. 50 per month. The average range was Rs. 70-80 for

bidi workers and about Rs. 100 for construction workers. The haasal workers thus rank above the domestic servants. Their earnings are lower than those of the bidi workers or the construction workers. A similar ranking was noted in the survey of Poona carried out in 1954.

The level of earnings of haasal workers in Poona may be compared with that of the women in white collar jobs like teacher-clerks, etc. Presently the differential works out to be about 1:6 while in 1954 the differential was noted to be 1:4. ~~while in 1954~~ The earnings of the unskilled, illiterate workers working in the unorganized sector appear to be more sticky as compared to the earnings of the educated women working mainly in the organized sector.

In view of the meagre income levels the plight of the haasal women and their families can very well be imagined. The meal usually consists of some wheat millet bread with chilli powder. An additional dish viz. vegetable side-dish was often reported by the women working in the Vegetable Market where they they often get some leftovers. The afternoon meal tends to be uncertain. If much work is not available on a particular day then it becomes difficult to cook even the meal at night. The purchases of daily necessities viz. foodgrains, oil, gur, firewood are usually made every evening out of the day's earnings. As the purchases are made in very small quantities effectively they have to pay higher prices. Some women reported that they would

have tea in the morning and may eat only some bread-pakouas during the day-time. A couple of cases were noted where the women had no shelter and could not do their own cooking.

Household Responsibility

In the majority of cases it is the woman's direct responsibility to stretch the budget to cover the needs of the household. The women were asked as to who manages the expenditure in the household. In 62 out of the 75 cases it was the interviewee herself who manages the household expenditure; in 6 cases the women together with her husband; in 2 cases a male relative (brother) other than the husband, and in one case only the husband exclusively bears this responsibility. Most of the women whose husbands are earning knew approximately how much the husband is earning, though in several cases he hands only a part of this amount to his wife. Thus, even though the women are almost without exception illiterate, they all have to deal with money and have to cope up with the task of making a meagre income fill the family's requirements.

D e b t

Information about indebtedness particularly about the amount of outstanding debt was difficult to get. Thirty-five women claimed to have no debts at all.¹³ Of those who reported to having debts, many gave very large amounts -

one or two thousands, often incurred at a time of marriage of a son or daughter. Loans of Rs. 100 to 600 mainly to meet the consumption needs were noted in 13 cases. The source of borrowing, in the great majority of cases was given as being 'relatives and neighbours' (Table 4.9). In three cases loans from moneylenders were reported. We tried to find out from the activists of the Hamaal Panchayat whether there were any professional moneylenders operating among hamaals, and received a negative answer - 'It is not worthwhile to lend to a hamaal. How can you recover the debt?' In the Government godown the workers' co-operative society lends to the hamaals, and the women describe this as 'borrowing from the malak'. (Table 4.10).

Consumption is by far the most frequent reason for getting into debt. In one case a woman said that there was still an amount of Rs. 3500 outstanding which her husband had incurred at the time of their marriage some fifteen years back. Dowry is not customary among these women's communities, but several women reportedly spent sums of Rs. 1000 to 2000 on the marriage ceremony itself, either of the son or the daughter. Illness is another reason for indebtedness where large sums appear. However, in the three cases where large debts due to family illness occur, the source is - a co-operative society at the son's/husband's/woman's place of work, where there is a regular monthly income.

Table 4.7. Distribution of surveyed families by source of borrowing.

Agency supplying loan	No. of families
relatives and neighbours	26
employer	2
professional moneylender	3
Bank or co-operative society	6
Other	3

Table 4.10. Distribution of surveyed families by purpose of borrowing

Purpose of borrowing	No. of families
Consumption	26
Marriage	8
Housing or rent	2
Illness	5
Other	1

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2. District Census Handbook, Poona, 1971.
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7. Towards Equality, op.cit., p. 176.
8. Women Construction Workers, G.P. Sinha, S.N. Ranade, ICSSR, New Delhi, 1975, p. 7.
9. Ibid., p. 61.
10. Towards Equality, op.cit., p. 180.
11. Malati Gadgil, op. cit., p. 33.
12. 'Problems of Working Women in Urban areas' in Social Scientist, Special no. on Women, Nov-Dec, 1975, pp. 129-131.
13. In the study of women construction workers in Bihar 59% of the families were in debt. The major reasons reported for getting into debt were sickness, marriage and the day to day consumption needs.

CHAPTER V

HOUSING AND DOMESTIC CONDITIONS

The unskilled manual workers with very low and uncertain income flow find it impossible to get entry into organised urban housing, i.e. secure a tenement with a room or two in a dwelling of permanent type with facilities of tap water, latrine, electricity and access to pakka road. The rents of even the most modest accommodation of permanent type are equal to or higher than their average monthly earnings. They are compelled to take shelter in the vast sprawling hutment colonies or sopadpattis - the make-shift shelters mostly lacking in the rudimentary amenities or in the old dilapidated congested housing in the older parts of the city. In the present study, the haasal women interviewed reported three types of dwellings. (1) kachcha shelter in a sopadpatti, (2) a room in a large wada^{*} in the old part of Poona city and (3) a single room in a chawl.

The majority that is 42 women live in the first type of dwelling, 16 live in a room in a wada, and 17 in chawls or in single room brick constructions. It is quite uncommon to have more than one room per family; only 4 women reported

* A two or three storeyed building around a courtyard, once occupied by a well-to-do joint family and now housing from 20 to 50 families.

a two-room tenement. Of these, two were women whose husbands have regular wage employment; one shares the two-room tenement with the sister's family; and one has taken an extra room at an extra rent of Rs. 5 per month because she has a son and a daughter studying at school. Living in a one-room tenement is quite crowded, the cooking, eating and sleeping for as many as 6 to 7 people, and everything else has to be carried out in the same room. Two women actually reported that they had no home for sometime now. One of them deserted by her husband had been earlier living with her brother, and after a quarrel with him had left his house and had been sleeping in a verandah of a wada, accompanied by her aged mother. The other woman working in the Timber Market sleeps in a shed adjoining to her employer's shop; she has no other home.

The areas of residence are largely determined by the place of work, as was noted in the chapter on working conditions. Most of the women working in Nana, Ganesh and Shawani wards live in the same area, in one room tenements in the wadas which are numerous there. The women working in the Vegetable Market are largely concentrated in two areas, a sopadpatti at the foot of Parvati hill and one on the Poona-Datara road on the southern outskirts of Poona. These sopadpattis are located at a distance of about two kilometres from the work place. The Railway Goods Yard workers mostly live in a nearby sopadpatti as do the women in the Timber Market. The sopadpatti near the Timber Market

is highly congested, with poor drainage and hardly any sanitary facilities, so that living conditions become almost intolerable in the monsoon season. Many of the workers from Railway Goods Yard got accommodation in the chawls built by the Government after the 1961 Panshet floods as their huts were washed away due to floods. Now a zopadpatti has also come up along side - also in poor condition in the rainy season. The zopadpattis near the Parvati hill and along Satara road are slightly better, with wider spacing between the huts and some public latrines within convenient distance. The gunny bag workers also live in the old part of Poona city, either in a room in a wada or in smaller groups of hutments. The women working in the Government godown come from different parts of the city; this is the only group with stable and better earnings that make it possible to stay even beyond the walking distance from the work-place.

The basic amenities of water tap, bathing place and latrines are extremely inadequate in most of the cases and at times even lacking altogether. The wadas usually have a water tap or two, a bathing place and a latrine around the central courtyard, shared by all the families living in the wada. Only one case was noted where there was a separate water tap in the tenement occupied by the respondent. The women living in zopadpattis have to fetch water from the common public water taps and use the

public latrines. There is often a pressure of 40 to 50 families on one tap and women have to wait in long queues to get a bucketful of water. Even though the distance travelled to fetch water may be shorter, the time spent is often as much under the urban conditions as compared to the situation in the village. Disputes and quarrels are frequent. The timing when the water is available - a few hours in the morning and in the evening - imposes a rigid schedule. In a few cases the women were fetching water from the canal, though this is prohibited, for want of any facility in the neighbourhood. The latrine was shared between 4 to 8 families in 14 cases, and by more than 8 families in 5 cases. In six cases there was no facility nearby and public latrines located at a considerable distance or near the work place were used. In eight cases, no facility was accessible and the women would use some public open space in the early hours of the morning. The lack of basic amenities thus imposed considerable hardship and unhygienic living environment; because of the lack of adequate surface water drainage facility the waste water stagnates due to the lack of garbage disposal arrangements and latrines the surroundings of the huts get littered.

Electric light is uncommon. Fifteen families - mainly from the Ganesh and Shawani wards - living in widas reported to have electricity in the tenement. Light is metered and costs about Rs. 5/- a month.

The monthly rent paid ranged from nil to about Rs.15 (Table 5.1). The highest rent paid is Rs. 20 by a woman working in the Government godown and earning Rs.200 a month. Some of the sapaipatti-dwellers are in illegal occupation of their hut sites, and pay no rent. Some have built their own structures and pay ground rent only. Only one woman reported that she belongs to a tenants' association.

Table 5.1

Worthly rent (Rs.)	No rent	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20+	Total
No. of families	10	28	20	13	3	1	75

The length of the period of stay in the present place of residence was noted and the following breakdown was obtained. (Table 5.2 on next page).

In the group who have lived in one place for 10-15 years are 12 women who moved to the new dwellings after the floods in 1961. The government built chawls for the flood victims in a number of areas. In all, there are 59 women who have occupied the same residence for 10 years or more, and 14 whose family (i.e. husband's family) has lived in the place for 2 or more generations. These mostly live in the old wajas.

The domestic work and household responsibility

"Man's work is from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done." This is how Shantabai described the situation. Shantabai lives in a sapaipatti on Poona-Satara road in a one-room kaccha hut and works in the Vegetable Market.

The monthly rent paid ranged from nil to about Rs.15 (Table 5.1). The highest rent paid is Rs. 20 by a woman working in the Government godown and earning Rs.200 a month. Some of the sopajatti-jewellers are in illegal occupation of their hut sites, and pay no rent. Some have built their own structures and pay ground rent only. Only one woman reported that she belongs to a tenants' association.

Table 5.1

Monthly rent (Rs.)	No. of families	% rent 1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20+	Total
	10	28	20	13	3	1	75

The length of the period of stay in the present place of residence was noted and the following breakdown was obtained. (Table 5.2 on next page).

In the group who have lived in one place for 10-15 years are 12 women who moved to the new dwellings after the floods in 1961. The government built chawls for the flood victims in a number of areas. In all, there are 57 women who have occupied the same residence for 10 years or more, and 16 whose family (i.e. husband's family) has lived in the place for 2 or more generations. These mostly live in the old wadis.

The domestic work and household responsibility

"Man's work is from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done." This is how Shantabai described the situation. Shantabai lives in a sopajatti on Poona-Satara road in a one-room kaccha hut and works in the Vegetable Market.

Table 5.2. Duration of stay at the place of residence.

	Under 5 yrs.	5-9 years	10-15 years	15-20 years	Over 20 years	2nd gene- ration
No. having lived in present place	8	8	22	13	10	14
No. of these who have lived in the same place since marriage/coming to Poona	2	2	5	8	6	14

She gets up at 2 o'clock in the morning, walks a quarter of a mile to fetch the water for the day, then cooks a meal for her son, who has a job as an apprentice in a workshop. She herself only takes a cup of tea in the morning, cleans up, and starts walking to the Vegetable Market by about 3.30 a.m. as it is a longish distance taking 30 minutes by foot. There are four other women from the same sopadpatti who accompany her. She reaches the Vegetable Market a little before she has to start work and uses the public latrine near the market, since there is no convenient latrine near her home. Then work starts at about 4.30 a.m. and she is busy carrying loads, weighing them, sorting the produce and so on till about 10, when the pressure slackens a little. Still, she has to wait in the market till 1.30 or 2.0 p.m. in case

her employer wants anything done, or in case a new truckful of produce arrives. In any case, she is paid her day's wage only at 2 in the noon. During the slack period she usually has a cup of tea at the hotel behind her workplace. Thus she has by 2 p.m. already an almost twelve-hour working day with only two cups of tea as nourishment. She then goes home, cooks her lunch, eats it, and sleeps till 5 p.m. or at the most 6 p.m. By that time her son has come home and she has to start preparing the evening meal, as well as doing the washing and cleaning that is needed. She rarely gets to bed before 10 o'clock. Then, less than 5 hours later, she has to start the routine all over again.

Sitabai, who lives in Ganesh ward may be said to be a little luckier because she has a 10-year-old daughter who helps her with the housework, and doesn't have very far to go to her work-place. Her husband is a hamaal in Jangery Lane, and she has two sons aged 12 and 3 as well as the daughter and a six month old baby girl. She lives in a small room in a wada which houses 25 other families like hers. There are two taps and one latrine in the house. Her first task after getting up at 5.30 a.m. is to fill water from the tap, and to clean up. Then she prepares a meal for her husband and a tiffin for her schoolgoing elder son, while the daughter looks after the youngest. At 9 o'clock she is out in the square with the other women

waiting for work. If there is not much to do, she looks in at home, brings her small baby outside for a while to relieve her daughter Laxmi. She feels badly about having to keep Laxmi at home, Laxmi would have liked to go to school like her brother, but then who will do all the work? Laxmi will have to stay at home until the baby is 3 or so. Then after a year or two it will be time to get her married. Where then is there time for education? And what would she do with it anyway? Sitabai got herself operated at the time of her last delivery, so at least there won't be any more babies.

After 5 o'clock there is not a chance of any more work. Sitabai buys onions from the Vegetable Market, and sits in the square in the evening to sell them. At seven she returns, and with Laxmi's help cooks the main evening meal. Her husband comes home late, doesn't come straight home after work, and it is often 10.30 a.m. before they eat. She has eaten a meagre lunch hurriedly between the jobs around one o'clock. It is midnight before she has cleared up and can go to bed.

This is the kind of life most of these women lead, and we have not taken examples of the most-poorly-off. They live, usually, in groups with relatives, people from their village and their co-workers as neighbours, and though there is a lot of mutual help among the women, all have the same problems, the same arduous hours of work, and

no visible way of moving to a better life. And, of course living and sharing with relatives in these conditions brings its own problems which sometimes aggravate the strains of daily life. For instance, there is the woman in Ganesh ward who has been living with her brother, but after a quarrel with her sister-in-law no longer shares anything more than a room with her brother's family. In a tiny room in yaad'a two families carry on their separate existence; the brother, his wife and two children under fire on one side and our interviewee, a widow and her daughter aged 9 in the corner.

It is the woman in all the households who bears the responsibility of domestic work. Invariably it is the woman who does the cooking and washing - mostly the working woman we interviewed and in a few cases some other female member of the family - mother, daughters. Even when the husband is unemployed and the woman is working full-time, this is so. Thus all the women have a long working day; from 9 to 9.30 a.m. till 10 p.m. at the earliest. The woman working in the Vegetable Market have to get up at 3.30 or 4 in the morning; they are usually home again by 2 o'clock and sleep for a couple of hours in the afternoon, and then cook, clean, etc. till 10 p.m. Most of the women cook a meal before going out for work and either eat at that time or come back at midday for lunch, when the work place is near enough. Another meal is cooked in the

evening. Some of the women in the Timber Market said that they have to leave the home in the morning after drinking tea - if there is any in the house - work all day, and use the day's earnings to buy food for the evening meal - if there is any earning. In the Railway Goods Yard too, we met women who often skip the first meal.

Looking after the children is of course, also the duty of the woman. So each woman who has children was asked what arrangements she makes for looking after them. The women whose children are now grown up were also asked what arrangements they made for their children when they were small, if they were working then. In 35 out of the 62 cases for whom the information was recorded, it was the woman's mother, mother-in-law or other adult female relative or a young daughter who helped out. Girls of 7 or 8 are often left in charge of younger children for the whole day. In 15 cases - the children are just left at home, with a word to the neighbours to 'keep an eye on them'. Bringing small children to work with them is not as common as it is with women sweepers, for example. This is dangerous particularly in the railway yard - one woman's child was crushed to death; it is not allowed in the Government godown; and among the women working in the Grain market it is possible to leave the children at home and look in on them occasionally. Thus only in the Timber Market and the Vegetable Market did we find some women

who had children with them. In all in eight cases the women took their children to the work place. The male members of the family were helping in this respect only as an exception; in one case the son was taking care of younger children and in one case the husband who was disabled and staying at home was minding the children. The children when young, were sent to the parents in the villages in two cases and brought back when grown to the age of five or six. The women are thus burdened with arduous work as hamaals, and all the domestic work worries and the responsibilities together with child-births at frequent intervals. How do they bear the strain?

Health

The noteworthy feature of the women's attitude to their health was the confident assertion of physical well-being typified by the answer 'good' to the first question requesting them to categorise the state of the health as good, indifferent or poor. Forty three women said that their health was good and 28 reported their state of health as indifferent. Good health for many meant the absence of any incapacitating ailment. They consider themselves not only fortunate but well as long as they can keep going and manage to do the days work. They have no time to attend to their own health problems and cannot afford to spend money for medication in case of most of the ailments.

'Indifferent' health usually means that the woman suffers pain in the joints, proneness to catch cold, runs a temperature from time to time, or has a chronically weak digestion. All these ailments are severely uncomfortable for a working woman. Many do not take any treatment for it. When they feel weak or faint they said, 'they take a glass of water, lift the load and get going'. The conditions of work are particularly unhealthy in the coal yard and in the confined spaces where gunny bags are sewn. The medical attention is generally out of reach of most of the women. They do not have the means to meet the charges of the private medical practitioner and cannot spare enough time and forego a day's earning and go to the general hospital for medical care available at nominal charge.

The main result of the long neglect of health and over-work seemed to be that the women aged at an early age. The women looked old around the age of 35-40.

How do the conditions of life in the city compare with the life in the village from where most of the women have migrated to Poona? The housing conditions have by and large deteriorated because of the congested living conditions and lack of sanitary facilities. Particularly in the rainy season the topadpattis get water-logged and the inhabitants have to live in filth. The only advantage seems to be the access for the most to the tap water - the protected drinking water supply of the city. The medical and health

facilities are also available in the city but are not within the easy reach of the poor like the hamaal women.

The burden of domestic work seems to have increased considerably. Even though certain tasks like the work of grinding, collecting fuel is no more done at home, the entire burden of the household chores falls mostly on the working woman. There is less help from the relatives, from the neighbours as each is caught in the busy time schedule of the city. This is particularly so in the case of child care. It was reported to be safer and easier for the child-care in the village. The domestic work tends to be more monotonous and tiring under the city slum conditions as almost all its social content is lost; there are more quarrels and problems arising due to the over-crowded living in a gopadpatti or in a yada.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

"The impact of transition to a modern economy has meant exclusion of an increasing number and proportion of women from active participation in the productive process. A considerable number continue to participate for no returns and no recognition. The majority of those who do participate fully are on sufferance, without equal treatment, security of employment and humane conditions of work. A very large number of them are subject to exploitation of various kinds with no protection from society or the State.

Adequate means for livelihood or employment is the chief objective of development. There has been little progress in the achievement of this right for both men and women, but estimates of employment and under-employment clearly indicate that the position is worse for women. While the constitution has guaranteed equal rights, the measures initiated since independence to remove women's disabilities and handicaps, particularly in the field of economic participation, have proved to be extremely inadequate.¹"

In the Indian plans, the welfare aspect such as in health, nutrition, education of women has received some attention. However, the need to consider the problem of employment of women as an integral part of development

planning is yet to get acceptance in the plan documents. The major problem that emerges even from this limited study of the hamaal women is the problem of employment and earnings. It is observed that the other problems, the problems of nutrition, health, housing, education, social development cannot be effectively tackled unless the crucial problem of ensuring a minimum basic income is solved.

In India the lack of overall growth in agriculture which is resulting in growing pressure on land, increase in the small non-viable holdings and landlessness and the decline in the house-hold industry like weaving, rice pounding, paper, tobacco processing etc. due to competition from the organized factory sector lead to increased under-employment and unemployment in the rural areas. Under such conditions city-ward migration of the rural poor becomes inevitable. The men find it difficult to secure work and the earnings are often irregular and inadequate for urban living. The women find it still more difficult to secure work as they are generally more backward in education and skill-levels. In such circumstances, the lack of urban job opportunities for women causes great hardship, especially to the wife.

Hamaal work, or the types of work covered in the survey, is one avenue that is open even to the illiterate unskilled women. Despite its being very arduous, it is one of the lowest-paid possible jobs even for women. In terms of

earnings it can be ranked just above domestic service only and below all other forms of manual labour like beedi-making, construction work and scavenging. The women hamaals interviewed expressed the view that they would prefer to take up any other kind of work particularly some job in a factory. In hamaal-work, a service activity essential to the functioning of the city's trade, there is no impact of modernisation. The work is tiring and the hours are long, but with long spells of waiting. There is total uncertainty in earnings. Even the rates of payment are not standardized for the type of work that the women hamaals do, though there is some regulation in this respect in the Vegetable Market and in the Railway Goods Yard. In the Government Godown there has been an attempt to regularise the work pattern and to establish fixed rates of payment. Workers' Cooperative Society is formed to furnish credit and to meet some of the welfare needs of the employees. Female labour in hamaal work is paid at lower rates than the male labour, and male and female areas of work are clearly defined. The Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamaal and other Manual workers Act, 1967 when applied will regulate in some measure the terms of employment. The Hamaal Panchayat has supported this proposal, but the women had no clear idea as to how the change is going to affect them. When asked whether they thought the implementation of the Act would improve their situation, they

expressed that the main reason for concern was the lack of sufficient and regular work. In fact, the plan to move the wholesale trade in grain, jaggery, chillies and other agricultural products to the Market Yard located at Gultekedi outside the Poona City area, will make the work of the women who at present carry head-loads over relatively short distances, practically superfluous. The use of the auto-carriages, bullock carts and hand carts to cover much longer distances between the new location of the agricultural produce market and the business areas of the rapidly expanding city of Poona, has no place for female labour of this type. So, in this case, rationalization of the trade will definitely hit women's employment in haamal work.

Effects of Migration

To what extent the move from the villages to the city helped improve the living conditions of the haamal women? If they left the village because they were starving, the economic level of the women covered in the study seems to be a little better. However, even this is not always true - some women in the Railway Goods Yard and Timber Market cannot always afford even one meal a day. The rise in money income is partly offset by the transfer to a totally money economy - one has to pay for everything here, even for the tasks such as grinding, pounding etc. that were done at home or for firewood which was usually collected

from the fields or woods back in the village. In that case, can one say that the women are compensated by greater leisure since some of their domestic duties are taken off their shoulders?

It was observed that this is not the case. The women are always under pressure of work. They are hard pressed for both time and money. There is a fall in the amount of time spent on religious and cultural activities. Pooja is taken quite casually, something to be done if one can spare the time. The only religious observance all the women manage to make is fasting. This is convenient in families where there is not always enough for all to eat and when the woman is expected to give way to the man's needs. Few women go to see movies; only the younger ones showed much interest and said that they tried to go once every two or three months if they could afford to. In fact, life in the city tends to become even more of a monotonous grind, unrelieved by festivals and fairs which are a periodic and integral part of the village life.

All the indications point to reduced leisure and few or no forms of relaxation and entertainment for the hamaal women in the city. If the domestic tasks are reduced, and that too only slightly, the number of women in the household is also smaller. The woman is much more on her own in the city. Even though the neighbours may be co-operative, the communal nature of some of the women's chores

is destroyed. Each has to manage everything in her tiny one-room house. Leaving small children under the care of neighbours is much more hazardous in the city, and the working mother who does this can never be mentally at peace until she returns home. Besides this, the unhygienic conditions of city slums appear to be more unpleasant and injurious to health than the conditions of the poor in a village. As for the urban amenities like electricity, sanitary facilities, only a small fraction of the hamaal have access to these facilities. Piped water supply from a common tap is available to a number of women from this group.

What about the other amenities of urban life? Does access to better banking services, better medical care, improve the living standard of these women as compared to their conditions in the village? One can safely say that the women make very little use of the formal credit institutions. Their borrowing habits are still similar to those of peasants; full of private arrangements for credit, where the magnitude of the sums involved does not become very clear. The low income level, the long hours of work and the time that need be spent at public hospitals together make it difficult for the women to make use of the medical facilities available in a city. Minor ailments are generally ignored. A large proportion of child-births still takes place at home. The women said that they cannot afford

even the nominal fees charged in the public hospitals.

It is observed that the social conditions change but little. Even though the women have now come into wider urban surroundings, they continue to live in a small circle. At the work place the work they do continues to be manual and unskilled. The organization of work is also on a traditional pattern. Their relations with the wholesalers and other dealers are by and large personal and non-contractual. They move mainly among the hamaal women almost all of whom are illiterate and have rural background. Reading news-paper is unknown. News about local events, elections, strikes, accidents at times reaches them but hardly touches their life. They mostly live in gopadpattis or wadas again inhabited by their like - the erstwhile village folks. They do not get entry into the organised urban life either at work or at their residence. The spirit of urbanism and urban way of life thus touches them but marginally.

The social set up and the norms continue to be basically traditional. Early marriages which are on the whole due to social pressure are frequent. The norms of family size - three to four children with a couple of sons persists. Childlessness is a stigma on the woman. The woman has an inferior social status in the family. The men do not help with the house work. The wife may occasionally curse out of fatigue and frustration but the idea that the husband

should also there in domestic chores is alien to her. The status of women in the other classes of the society is no different from this. However, in this class a husband is not considered to be a reliable means of support, nor is he particularly respected as he is in a middle-class family. Many a widow thinks herself to be well rid of him. Such attitudes are found among working peasant women also, but there the factor which reinforces patriarchal domination in the family is the monopoly of man in the ownership of land. In the city, however, in a class where the man neither owns any land nor is a reliable source of financial support, the women are not much hampered by the male domination in personal life. Alcoholism, infidelity and other forms of social aberrations no doubt occur, but were not cited as major problems. Though it is not a viable social alternative for a woman to remain unmarried, they do not waste many tears on a husband who dies or deserts them.

The women accept their lot with little complaint. The life pattern is attuned to such a low standard that the women are pathetically grateful even for such small negative mercies such as respite for an hour from the day long labouriousness or a helping hand from the daughter. They face day after day fourteen or fifteen hours' work without interruption. Whatever the conditions of her health the arduous household work and the work for the whole family have

to be done. The daily round of work is so hard and exhausting that even women with strong health get worn out and find it more and more difficult to cope up with the daily routine of work.

It is not surprising that very few women find some time and energy to take active part in the work of organisations like Hamaal Panchayat, where they can learn about wider issues in their own or other peoples' life. It is rare to find amongst the active members of this organization the women whose poverty and hard working conditions demand greatest measure of consideration. The women are so burdened with the problem of survival from day to day that they have no time to spare for such 'irrelevant considerations' like better educational and training facilities, basic medical care, organized cooperation, rudimentary sanitary and other facilities in the housing.

The membership of the Hamaal Panchayat is expanded through an automatic inclusion of any new woman who is taken for hamaal work through a sense of fellow feeling rather than a consciousness of being belonging to a union. The participation in the Union activities is in terms of attending meetings and other programmes organized by the Union. Such mobilization takes place largely on account of personal loyalty to the leader rather than through an awareness of the role and value of organized cooperative effort to improve their working conditions, regulate hours

of work, increase their earnings, improve the living conditions and so on. Militancy appears in the form of readiness to fend for oneself in a society which is not likely to look after one's interests rather than through the awareness of exploitation.

There were few complaints about the treatment by the employers, except in the Vegetable Market where the employers are said to be strict about women sitting down to rest between jobs, and arbitrary in giving vegetables to take home at the end of the day - using this as a means of discrimination.

To sum up - in haasal work, one of the major occupations open to the unskilled workers in the city, the women are losing ground. A major reorganisation of the trade like the shift of the wholesale trade in agricultural produce to a new location which is at a considerable distance from the city makes the service of carrying head-loads almost redundant. This will, over the period of the next year, throw a number of women haasals, out of employment. They may be pushed into domestic service, the only occupation which is not shrinking and which is the most ill-paid and servile occupation.

If the process of women being thrown out of work or getting pushed into inferior occupations is to be reversed, then it is necessary to take certain positive action with a long term perspective in relation to the employment of women.

Firstly, it is necessary to provide for diversified training and educational facilities for the migrant women. Subsequently their placement into a variety of jobs in the organised sector so as to yield a steady need-based income has to be ensured. It is contended that women tend to prefer work in household industries and in service trade rather than wage employment in the factories because of the advantage of flexible working hours and also because such work does not entail contact with strangers. It is also suggested that factory work is not regarded as respectable work for women.² The hamaal women, however, indicated a clear preference for work in organised sector particularly in factory mainly because of the expectation of better pay and some security of employment.³ The strict work schedule and the need to leave the home for long hours to work in the organised sector calls for organisation of child care, canteen and other home service facilities so that there would be some relief for women from their domestic responsibilities. With the organisation of educational and training facilities and institutionalisation of some part of the domestic work, the women can take up employment in the factories and other modern trades. Instead of operating on limited schemes of self-employment by giving the illiterate women some small loans to work as vegetable vendors, dealers in second-hand goods and such other very low income and unskilled occupations or giving

then short training courses in the so-called 'feminine' vocations like cooking, sewing and expecting them to be self-reliant, every attempt must be made to speedily equip them so as to absorb them in the wide spectrum of modern occupations.⁴ (*) With the improvement in the educational and skill levels and subsequently their income levels they would be in a position to use the modern amenities like the health and medical facilities, educational and cultural facilities and attain an improvement in the quality of life.

It is contended that the planned entry of women into modern occupations will make the problem of unemployment of the men still more serious. The question is - 'Is gainful work a prerogative of men? Does not the Indian Constitution lay down equality to all the citizens - men as well as women? The plan of economic development has to be so designed that the entire working-age population gets the opportunity of productive employment. Judicious allocation of the investible resources in the rural and in the urban sector can provide employment for both men and women on expanding

(*) In a study on working women made in 1960 attention was drawn to the need of upgrading women workers into enlightened and skilled class of employees. It was stressed that one cannot employ women in a haphazard manner merely because they are on the verge of starvation without making a determined effort to raise and improve their standard of work and production, their outlook on life, their blind following of reactionary tradition, their lack of planning and coordinate thinking.

scale ensuring gradually improvement in skills and productivity levels. What is necessary for this is to make full employment the objective of planning.

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