A familiar sight to be seen in Ahmednagar district towards the end of the monsoons, is the migration of the Laman tribe as they move with their belongings from their settlements on the borders of Ahmednagar and Beed districts to either the Konkan region of the Western Ghats or to the irrigated tracts forming the area of operation of the Sugar Factories in the Western and Southern parts of Maharashtra. Along the roads leading to these areas one can see the men, the women with their colourful costumes and the children, either walking alongside their pack bullocks or sitting in the bullock carts and what strikes the casual observer is the fact that the migration is by entire families rather than by individuals only.

The Laman groups which are located in the eastern parts of Ahmednagar and adjacent parts of Beed district are known to the outsiders by the general term 'Banjara', a term originally applied to any group primarily identified with pack bullock transport. Their origins are not clear but they claim to have initially come from Marwar (Rajasthan) and their language Ghormati bears close affinity to the Rajasthani and Gujarathi dialects. Various theories, views and counterviews about the Laman's origin etc. have been discussed in Chapter - III. With a decline in the demand for pack transport as other means of communication became available, many of them turned to alternate occupations, including settled agriculture. Some have switched
completely to these alternate occupations such as construction work, others, such as the group studied here, follow both ways of life: settled agriculture for part of the year and a seasonal migration to the traditional occupation of transporting goods on pack bullocks.

The home settlements (Tandas) of these Lamans are mainly located in the hilly tracts consisting of the northern part of the Ahmednagar plateau which extends south into Pathardi taluka of Ahmednagar district and Ashti taluka of Beed district. (See map of Pathardi taluka) This area falls within the rain shadow of the Sahyadri range and, as a consequence, has a rainfall of 500 - 600 mm.; which, besides being low, is also erratic and unreliable. The soils in this area are 'light' and stoney. The normal agricultural practice in this area is to sow pearl millets (Bajra) in the first rains and harvest a small crop in the kharif season which is just about adequate to meet the immediate and pressing consumption needs of most agricultural households. The possibility of taking a second crop of sorghum (Jowar) in the rabi season is limited by the availability of relatively better land. Agriculture in these areas is, therefore, not able to sustain the population and provide adequate employment because of the poor yields coupled with a monocrop cultivation and is at best only of a subsistence nature. This situation is further aggravated with the failure of the monsoons which is as often as once in two or three years. In such circumstances, the phenomenon of out-migration is likely to occur and given the periodicity of the agroclimatic factors which influence it, will be seasonal in nature.
Further, where scarcity and drought are chronic such migration tends to get institutionalised over a period of time.

The Laments having had the traditional occupation of caravan men transporting goods by pack bullocks and having skills relating to animal husbandry, this tends to influence their choice of alternative occupation at the place of migration. A large number, therefore, migrate to the Western Ghats region where they work for contractors as transporters of the charcoal which is prepared by the Katkari tribals in the scrub forests of this area. They transport it by pack bullocks to the road heads from where it is picked up by trucks and carried to the large urban markets. Alternatively, some of the Laments work as petty contractors in their own right. Only a few groups consisting of small working units, migrate seasonally to the sugar cane growing areas under the areas of operation of Sugar Factories where they are employed from October up to May at harvesting and cutting the cane and transporting it to the Sugar Factories in bullock carts.

This study concentrates on the migration of the majority of the Laments, and examines the mode of recruitment for employment in the Konkan, the migration, the actual work campaign and system of remuneration there.

An important feature of this offseason employment in the Konkan is that throughout this period of seven or eight months, the migrant Laments are not paid their wages in cash, but only in kind by way of supplies of foodgrains, fodder etc. and the accounts of these transactions are maintained only by
the agents or subagents of the contractors for the Lamans, themselves, are illiterate. As a result of this, when the contractor's operations cease with the onset of the monsoon and the final accounts are prepared, only a very few of the migrants come away with any balance of wages in cash. A preponderant majority finds itself further indebted to the contractors and are required to return to work with the same contractor in the following season. The contractual relationship thus takes on the characteristics of the system of bonded labour.

At the end of this working season from October to June, when the monsoon breaks over the Western Ghats causing a cessation in the operations of the coal-manufacturing industry, the migrant Lamans return to the native villages in Pathardi taluka. There, between June and September/October, they till their ancestral plots of land for the kharif season and, sometime after the festival of Diwali (depending each year on the pattern of the monsoon rains), set out once again on their seasonal migration to the Konkan to work for the charcoal contractors.

Though no published figures regarding the extent of this seasonal migration of the Lamans are available, the overall dimensions of this phenomenon seem substantial. Owing to its widespread incidence, it was felt that this phenomenon deserved to be studied in detail. Moreover, interest was first generated in this group - the Lamans and the phenomenon of their seasonal migration when the author was posted as Assistant Collector from 1975-1977 in Rahuri Sub-division
which includes Pathardi tahsil. As an administrator, this problem of seasonal migration held particular interest especially with reference to the effectiveness of governmental policies for development. This led her to take study leave from the State Government between June and November, 1978 in order to do systematic research into this subject. The basic field data was, therefore, collected during this period although some work was done during the earlier tenure as Assistant Collector and later as Additional Collector of Ahmednagar district up to June, 1979.

The objectives

This study is primarily a case-study, from the sociological point of view, of the seasonal migration of the Lamans of Pathardi. The main objective is to understand the factors that cause this annual phenomenon, the socio-economic circumstances of this group in its home region, the method of recruitment for employment in the Konkan, the pattern of work there and the rate of remuneration received by them. A second objective is that, seeing this migration from the perspective of the push-pull theory of migration, to assess whether the push or pull factors are more dominant in this particular case. Thirdly, if it is found, upon analysis, that the push factors are more important in causing this movement, to identify the costs involved in the migration, both at the individual and societal levels.

A fourth objective is to study the impact of government's developmental programmes on this group. As an administrator,
the concern is to see whether the various government schemes, when translated to the field, are, in fact, able to actually improve the condition of the target-troops in keeping with the scheme's stated objectives and goals. And finally, if there appears to be some hiatus between the schemes as conceptualized and their actual implementation or import in the field, to identify the manner in which they should be reformulated or the areas in which new policies and programmes can be recommended.

**The method and outline of work.**

The data to study the problem with these objectives in mind, was collected during a number of visits to the Manikdaundi village extending between August and December (1978) which coincided with the agricultural operations in the kharif season and thus afforded first-hand impressions of the agricultural practices, the quality of life in the tandas, the division of work among family members, etc. This was followed by a short trip to Khad in Ptnagiri district during December (1978) - January 1979 in order to verify at first hand the reported facts of "life at the other end", the forest campsites in the Konkan where the migrant Lamas live during the work campaign, the system of wages, the arrangements for market, etc. The detailed methodology is discussed further in Chapter II which deals with some theoretical considerations relevant to the phenomenon of migration. Chapter III traces the origin, history and ethnography of this tribe in order to identify the group and place them in their present context. In Chapters IV and V we analyse in detail
the social and economic conditions of the Lamans in their home region, first at the regional and district level and next, more particularly in Manikdaund, the selected village. The actual migration is described in Chapter VI which discusses the mode of recruitment, the journey and the work-campaign of the Lamans in the Konkan. Chapter VII describes the role of government - both as it exists today vis-a-vis this group and as it should be, more ideally, from the point of view of the specific problems of this group. The concluding chapter gives the main findings of this study and sums up its relevance in understanding the problems of one segment of the vast population of the poor in this country.