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DETERMINING THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The outcomes of migration have traditionally been described in terms of economic mobility. While measuring the impact of migration in terms of improved financial positioning is important, migration does not necessarily improve the economic and social status of the migrant, particularly, migrant women. This paper highlights how the impact of migration on migrant women is defined in complex terms, encompassing domestic patriarchy, social mobility, conventional femininity and sustained economic stability. The paper also focuses on the contradictory elements which determine the migratory experience of women and how their future plans are influenced by a multitude of factors, not limited by their past experiences and the socio-political climate.

KEY WORDS: Migration, International Migration, Women, India, United Arab Emirates.

Migration has a significant impact on the migrant and on the members of his/her household. It redefines the contours of relationships within the household while also reshaping in a complex manner the way family members live and govern their lives. The social structuring of society and households wherein sexual division of labour is pervasive, significantly influences migratory outcomes, particularly for migrant women. This paper focuses on the impact and outcome of the migration on the individual family members, the household as a whole and the migrant. It aims to highlight that the psychological and emotional burden of separation and provision are shared disproportionately by household members.

The research, findings and outcomes of the paper are based on a study of Indian migrant women in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It studies women across skill categories to better understand the differences in their lived experiences as migrants, if any. Women engaged in nursing, teaching, sales, cleaning and domestic work were interviewed. Narrative interviews and a structured survey were used to collect information and stories on the work and life of 154 Indian migrant women in the UAE. Fieldwork was conducted in working and living spaces of the workers to understand how spatiality helps to frame identities. The UAE was chosen as the field of study as it has the largest number of Indian migrants living abroad. Yet, due to heavy censorship and lack of freedom of association within the UAE, little is known about the lives of the Indian diaspora, particularly, migrant women.

While the original study was wide, examining numerous facets of migration, this paper focuses on the impact migration has on family structures, domestic patriarchy and the position of the migrant within the household and immediate community settings. Section 1 is founded on the analysis of 'global care chains' as defined by Arlie Russell Hochschild with reference to domestic workers and is expanded to include all participants to illustrate the effect of migration on household and caregiving responsibilities.

To define the impact migration has, the second section of the paper delves into the role of remittances. To ascertain remittances in tangible terms, it is divided into two, economic remittances and social remittances. Remittance plays a poignant role in the lives of family members left behind. It helps them to move beyond daily survival and helps invest in other aspects of life such as health, education, building a house and purchasing of consumer durables. These have an indirect impact on the lives of those left behind as well as it results in an increase in social status.

The topic of economic remittances, particularly from the Middle East, has dominated literature on migration. Therefore, social remittances are also brought into focus to evaluate if beliefs and values are remoulded by migration itself and through interactions in the receiving countries. An analysis of how and to what extent they help in transforming normative behaviour in India is undertaken. In doing so, a simultaneous assessment of the impact of migration on the participant woman and her family emerges.

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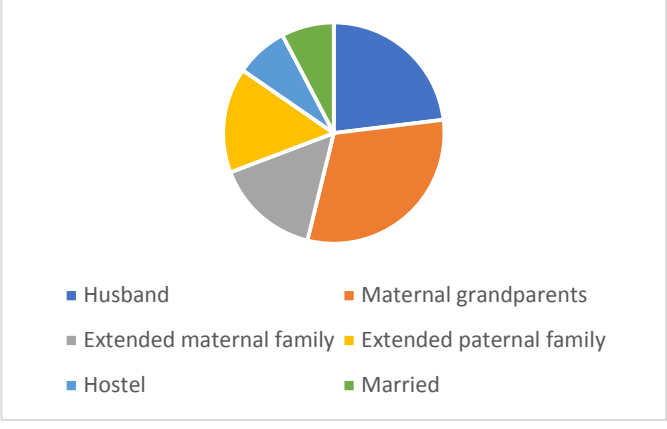
Based on migratory experiences, migrants develop a pragmatic realism towards their future or their next step. This last section will conflate the socio-political determinants, the familial and economic pressures and the priorities of women to provide a holistic picture of how they determine their decision to continue in the UAE, go back to India or migrate to a different country. It will bring forth the contradictory elements of compromise, determination and agency that define decision making by migrant women.

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION

Impact on members of the household

As the population ages and as more women enter the labour force, the demand for domestic workers is set to increase. This will lead to the movement of women from poorer nations to wealthier ones proliferating what Arlie Hochschild referred to as 'global care chains'. A 'global care chain' is defined as a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring (Hochschild, 2000). This purchase of domestic work starts from a rich country, where the woman engages a domestic worker from a poorer country. The woman from the poorer country migrates leaving her own children behind, either in the care of the husband with the help locally hired domestic workers from a poorer family or leaving the child (ren) with the extended family. Therefore, as we move down the chain, the value associated with labour decreases and is often unpaid at the end of the chain (Yeates, 2005).

Figure 1.1: Responsibility of caregiving upon migration (select participants)



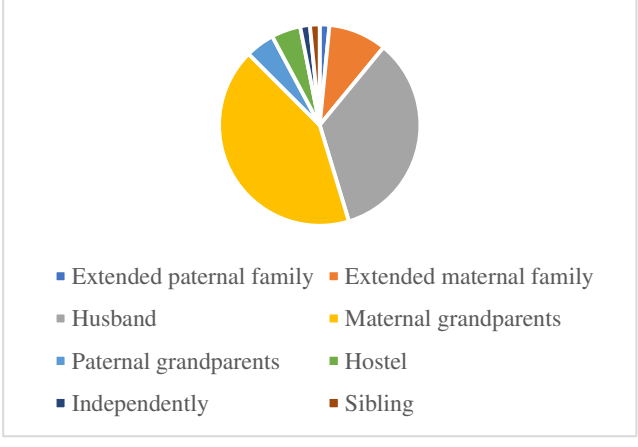
Source: Primary field-based data

As seen in figure 1.1, the phenomenon of global care chains is evident in the case of participant domestic workers. Of the married domestic workers, all except two depend on the immediate or extended family to take care of children left behind. Since the poorest in the chain cannot afford paid domestic work, global care chains symbolise wealth disparities and social divisions. These inequalities are emboldened through the process of outsourcing as employment of a domestic worker is a means of reproducing lifestyle and social status (Yeates, 2005).

Global care chains lead to a to a redistribution of caring duties on the lines of race and gender. Displacement of love and attention from the child(ren) of the domestic worker to the ones they are taking care of in the country of destination are a consequence of global care chains. The displacement is generally upwards in wealth and power. It results in an analogue of 'surplus value' as termed by Marx in the form of 'emotional surplus value' (Hochschild, 2000). The expending of this emotional surplus value on the child(ren) in the household they are employed in results in immense psychological burden for the domestic worker, at times hampering relationships with her own child(ren).

While global care chains focus on domestic workers only, all migrants who are legally prohibited to or cannot afford to sponsor their family in the country of destination have to bear the psychological and emotional pain of separation from their families, particularly children. Therefore, migrants belonging to other occupational categories also mobilise extended family support to care for their children. They rely on the unpaid caregiving of family members to compensate for love and affection displaced due to migration as ascertained by figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Responsibility of caregiving upon migration



Source: Primary field-based data

Most of the caregiving responsibility is delegated to extended members of the family. Family obligations span over generations and are not restricted to one particular relationship between the parent and child (Izuhara &

Shibata, 2002). While husbands do take on caregiving on the migration of women as evidenced by figure 1.2, they are not the primary caregiver. Most of the men live with and are supported by either the paternal or maternal grandparents or the extended paternal family of the child(ren). Thus, women are at the centre of both global care chains and caregiving. The absence of men from caregiving and domestic responsibilities is a consequence of the patriarchal social structures which dictates gendered norms and leads to a gendered division of labour in both sending and receiving countries. This results in most caregiving responsibilities being borne by maternal grandparents and extended maternal family as social customs do not allocate domestic obligations to the paternal side. Therefore, migration enables the reinforcement and reproduction of discriminatory social practices.

In some cases, financial constraints restrict migrants from bringing all their children to the UAE. The high living expenses in the country necessitates women to supplement household incomes. However, the family is financially unable to sponsor a domestic worker on their visa to prevent the women from working a 'double day'. This leads to leaving behind the younger child(ren) and bringing the older one(s) to the country of destination. For example, Rose, one of the participants, has three children. She works an eight-hour shift everyday as a nurse in a clinic in Dubai, while her husband works and resides in Abu Dhabi. Only her oldest daughter, aged nine lives in Dubai with her. The other children are very young, one is two years old and her son is only 6 months old. Since they would require caregiving during work hours, she left them in Tamil Nadu with her parents.

Children left behind are referred to as 'mobility orphans' and are forced to live without the presence, support and guidance of one or both parents. Parents leave children behind in order to provide a better quality of life for them, however, the deficiency of care, particularly during formative years leads to poor psychological and moral development in some cases. A study showed that children with migrant mothers perform poorly academically and experience inadequacy in terms of mental and physical development (Yeoh & Lam, 2006). Therefore, a comprehensive support system is required to ensure that children left behind receive care, guidance and attention.

Several migrant women recite how their children experience loneliness on special occasions such as birthdays and festivals. Children who have both parents working overseas often complain that their parents do not wish them at midnight on their birthdays whereas all other children's parents at school do so. Such instances reinforce feelings of abandonment and isolation.

In an effort to compensate for their absence, migrant women tend to send plenty of material goods such as toys and clothes along with a regular supply of monthly remittance. The relationship between mother and child is reduced to a commodity based relationship and is referred to as the 'commodification of love'. The fulfilment of the material desires of the children help women define a new paradigm of relationship which stands apart from the parental love bestowed upon them by other family members. Children along with family members get accustomed to the regular flow of income and gifts received from the migrant which can only be sustained by working abroad. As a consequence, the woman's absence from home is taken for granted till a steady flow of income is received. This leads to either prolonging her stay in the UAE or engaging in circular migration.[2] As per primary data collected, participants tend to stay in the UAE for a long period of time, for an average of 6.38 years. Also, 19 percent of participants are circular migrants. The compensatory and guilty forms of motherhood that the woman has to indulge in is problematic as it is based on traditional notions of mothering which view transnational mothers as inadequate (Oishi, 2005).

Impact on women

Working overseas, particularly when it spans several years, leads to changes in the dynamics of relationship between the worker and her kin, society at large and her notion of 'home'. Women begin to lead atomised lives, emancipated from the controls imposed upon by family members in India. Some find it hard to fit back into family life which is governed by pressures from family members and is subject to local customs. Due to long periods of absence, some women are devoid of sentiments towards their family members on return. At times, family members do not reciprocate feelings of love and care on return of the migrant. Geeta works as a conductor and janitress in UAE. She migrated in 2013 and is unambiguous about her plans to return to India. My husband and I both work in the UAE. Before migrating, we used to live with my husband's family in a two-bedroom rented house in Kerala. I do not want to live with my husband's family. I want to continue working in Dubai till I can build a house in India, only then will I consider moving back.

Women are stretched thin between returning to their family and retaining their autonomy. This apprehension

is heightened in places such as the UAE where migrants do not have the option of permanent settlement. Therefore, women often engage in circular migration by which they stay in India for a few years, do not assimilate and subsequently look for new migratory pastures.

Women's migration also impacts the way in which men of the household assert and practice their masculinity. While some may step in to assume responsibilities of the primary caregiver (this is rare as seen earlier), others might look for jobs that supplement remittances the family receives. However, there is a tendency to assert their position as the patriarch by tightly controlling the remittances received. These might be used for household expenditures but might also be used for indulgence in excessive drinking and women. These have an adverse effect on the migratory experience of the woman as she is blamed for the disintegration of the family. She might also have to cut short her employment abroad due to the lack of a caregiver in the household.

Due to the physical distance between the worker and her child(ren), mothering takes new forms. The advancement of information and communication technology has ensured that women can actively take part in the lives of her child(ren) in India. The bond between mother and child(ren) evolve to adopt a transnational character. During fieldwork, women were seen talking to their child(ren) in the evening after returning from their shift. Most had headphones on while they engaged in their evening chores. Thus, women create ways of staying connected with their children and to provide emotional support, at times, more than that provided by the family locally. However, such engagement if often threatened by negative influences of the family in India and by policies of the UAE government such as the ban of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services.[3] Since most women cannot afford to pay the exorbitant international calling charges, they are effectively cut off from communication with their child(ren). This further fuel their vulnerabilities and anxieties.

Migration also alters the association women have with the community at large. In case of domestic workers, the perceived transgressions of morality and sexuality puts them and their families in a disadvantaged position. Their economic mobility is thus believed to be tainted with these misdemeanours. Even in the case of other migrant women, it is largely held that the person able to *spend* the money often acquires more authority than the person who *earned* it (Moors, 2003). This is particular to the case of women. There is a systematic devaluation of the labour power and the earning capacity of all migrant women.

Therefore, the idea of home evolves for migrant women from a linear understanding of physical proximity to a transnational notion which transcends space and conventional values of femininity. It can become a broken home due to family disintegration, a lost home when it is taken away from her by her kin or a commodity to exchange for travel when it is used as collateral (Pattadath, 2014).

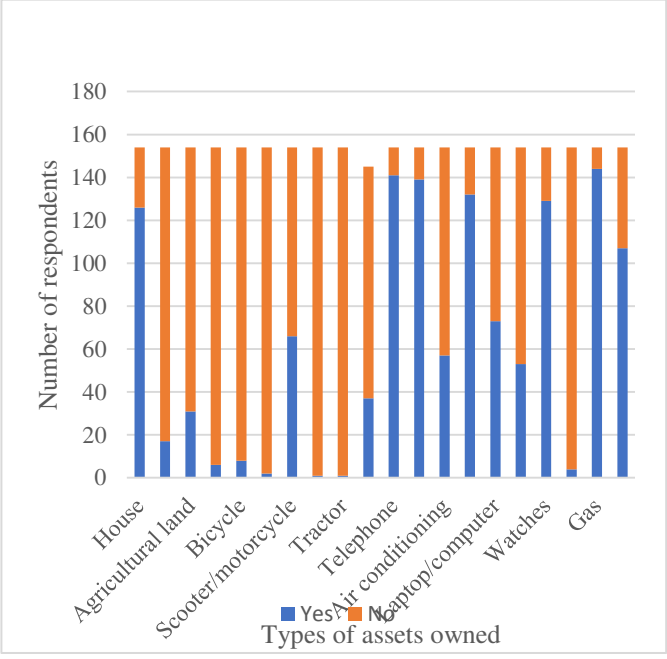
REMITTANCES AND THEIR USE

Economic remittances

It is largely believed that women bear the fruit of their labour on returning back to the home country through upward social and economic mobility. However, studies have found that female returnees often report the loss of gendered gains made due to migration upon return (Caritas Internationalis, 2012). There are also high increased personal and social costs of return for women migrants, as compared to men, without adequate gender-responsive services. They return to the same gendered and discriminate labour market relegating them to domestic chores or the informal sector once again. Vasudha is a domestic worker and a circular migrant whose narrative describes the problems faced on returning to India. I first migrated 20 years ago. I worked both in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Then I returned back to Mumbai. But my husband passed away and due to our financial position, when I got a job in UAE I migrated again. I do not have a house of my own in India. I am trying to earn money to build one. I used to work as an electrician in India but that was a long time ago. With no job, I will have to stay hungry if I go back.

As experienced by Vasudha, despite years of work experience, migrants do not find employment in India. Employment opportunities with salaries commensurate to their experience is a rarity. This makes woman reliant on migration as a livelihood strategy. A major reason for such a norm is also the lack of investment undertaken by women for themselves. Since the basic aim of migration initially is to meet day-to-day survival needs, women do not save or invest their incomes. Most migrants prioritise food, clothing and education of children, followed by acquiring land to build a house. However, the culmination of numerous factors such as high cost of migration, lack of control on remittances sent and evolving needs of household members, restricts economic mobility. As seen in Vasudha's case, her 20-year migration stint did not improve the financial conditions of the family.

Figure 1.3: Ownership of assets in India by participants



Source: Primary field-based data

A contributing reason to the lack of investment of remittances is that as a steady flow of money is received from abroad, the expectations of household members increase. In order to obtain or sustain a middle-class status, a large portion of remittance received is spent on consumer durables.

As ascertained by the graph, a very small proportion of participants own income generating assets such as shops/commercial establishments, agricultural land and livestock. Asset ownership trend conforms with the literature that most income is spent on consumer durables. This adversely impacts return migrants as they once again become fully reliant on their husband and family for their financial needs or are forced to take up employment opportunities that might be exploitative or unsafe. Due to their long absence from the local labour market in India, they do not have networks which can be leveraged to obtain employment. In all circumstances, women's independence is chipped away.

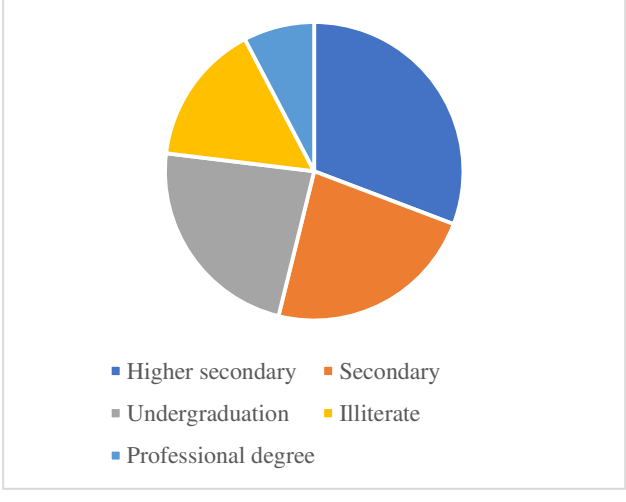
2.2 Social remittances

The status of transiency created in the UAE coupled with a vast Indian community ensures interconnectedness between migrants and their place of origin. This allows for practices and ideas to be reshaped in the UAE through interaction with not just other nationalities but also by association with other Indians. When women speak to family members on the phone or when they visit home, these ideas get transmitted to others. The flow of new values and practices are termed as social remittances. As social remittances increase due to greater association between two nations and acceptance, a transnational public space emerges. This space allows for individuals in both India and the UAE to simultaneously engage in common activities, though not equally (Levitt, 1998). Cultural diffusion and social influencing are facilitated through this process of exchange.

Therefore, despite the agency exercised while taking the decision to migrate or the independence gained while staying overseas, women do not always break the confines of patriarchy. They continue to comply with dominant social norms of family and society. They also expect their daughters and daughters-in-law to conform to the male breadwinner and domesticity norms. Shazia's, account evidences this. I have two sons and two daughters. Both my daughters are married. One lives in Andhra Pradesh and the other in Dubai. They have both finished their diploma in nursing but are housewives. Since their husbands earn enough, they do not need to work.

This trend is not limited to Shazia. In fact, a number of participants who have daughters conform to the male breadwinner and domesticity norms. While the majority of participants' daughters are studying, the others are housewives. Only daughters of two participants are employed. This is not to say that those who are housewives have not been educated. Figure 1.4 shows their education qualifications.

Figure 1.4: Educational qualifications of daughters of select participants



Source: Primary field-based data

It is worth noting that the sons of the participants while working are not always more qualified than the daughters. In most cases, they have a lower level of literacy in comparison to the daughters. This can be symbolic of the increased value of well educated women in the matrimonial market. For example, Sonal works as a domestic worker in Dubai. Her daughter has an undergraduate degree. Her daughter used to work in a beauty parlour in Dubai before she got married. She is now a housewife. On the other hand, her son had to drop out of school after class 10 due to family problems and is currently employed in an office job in India. With a MBA certification to her credit, his wife is more qualified than he is. Even though she holds a higher earning potential in the marketplace, she is currently a housewife. This contravenes popular understanding that daughters of working mothers have a higher labour force participation and wages and are more likely to hold managerial positions (McGinn, Castro, & Lino, 2015).

Further, women adhere to societal norms of marriage and dowry. They ensure that their daughters are married in socially appropriate ways by spending large sums on marriages and dowries. A number of women take loans to finance these social obligations. For example, Tenzin is a domestic worker who took two loans to finance her daughter's wedding. She borrowed a sum of Rs 3,00,000 from a bank and another worth Rs 2,00,000 from relatives. Others who do not have the collateral to take bank loans and social capital to borrow from relatives are forced to rely on informal sources of credit. Tasneem had to borrow from a gold pawn broker. She took a loan worth Rs 1,50,000 in 2012 and still has Rs 35,000 of the principal outstanding. Based on information divulged by her, she pays approximately 54 percent per annum as interest on the loan taken. Sometimes entire life earnings are expended for these purposes. This happened with Priyanka. To comply with social convention, she bought gold for her daughter's wedding due to which she could not build a house. As seen by these examples, women migrants 'bargain with patriarchy' to exercise their agency and mobility (Kandiyoti, 1988).

3 AN EVALUATION OF FUTURE PLANS

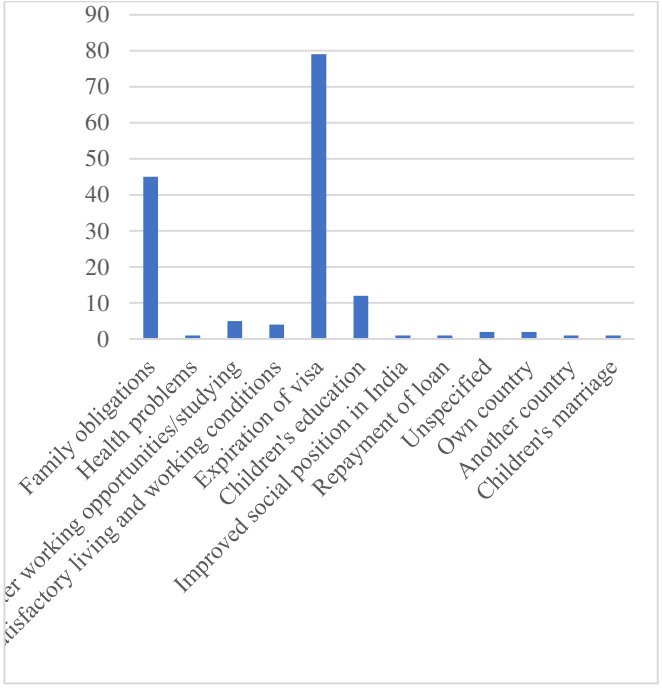
The decision to leave UAE is shaped by a multitude of factors, several beyond the control of migrant women. Local socio-political developments influence the future migratory trajectory of workers and in some cases, make the decision for them. Three recent developments, namely, Project Emiratisation, the oil crisis and implementation of indirect taxes will determine the flow of migrants into and out of the country in the coming years.

In an effort to reduce the enormous labour market segregation between the national and international labour force, the UAE government introduced a policy of Emiratisation. Based on a quota system, the policy aims to increase the participation of Emiratis in the private sector to reduce dependence on migrant workers. When the policy was first introduced, it created a wave of panic amongst migrant workers and it featured prominently in public discourse. However, the impact of Emiratisation has been minimal on the international workforce, particularly unskilled jobs and will remain so in the coming years. The Emirati population disregards low skilled and semi-skilled jobs (and to an extent nursing) due to which they are exclusively occupied by migrant workers. While teaching jobs might be threatened by the policy, schools are dichotomised on the basis of nationality, thereby minimising adverse impact on Indian teachers. Therefore, the nationalisation policy is tainted with the intention of maintaining the status quo of racial superiority and class distinction.

A more pressing concern for participants and the migrant community at large is that of the plummeting prices of global oil. This has severely impacted government revenues resulting in a fiscal deficit of 5.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016 (The World Bank, n.d.). In an effort to revive the economy, the UAE federal government has started diverting investments to other sectors such as real estate, international finance, transport and retail trade (The World Bank, n.d.). Concentration on and expansion of these new sectors shifts demand from unskilled and semi-skilled workers to skilled workers. This has already resulted in a drop of employment in the country which is set to increase in the coming years (Maceda, 2015).

Despite the unfavourable socio-political changes in the UAE, women determine their future plans mainly based on what is important to them. These largely centre around economic and social mobility, and enhancement of their children's prospects. As long as employment in the UAE fulfils these ambitions, very few migrants alter their migratory plans in response to changes in external conditions. These reasons are reflected in the responses gained from participants when asked about their plans to go back to India.

Figure 1.5: Primary motivation of participants to move back to India



Source: Primary field-based data

When asked about their future plans, most women cite expiration of visa as the primary determinant of their migration trajectory. They hope to stay in the country till as long as they can to meet their and their family's objectives. Farhana's narrative illustrates this strategy. My husband is not working and we have two children. We bought a house in 2015 for which we borrowed Rs 12,00,000 from the bank. Working conditions here are difficult but being in UAE is a necessity. I am not thinking of going back right now because I do not know where and how to work in India since I have been in the UAE for nine years.

Rigzen's story is similar to that of Farhana's. She migrated to UAE in 2009 and works as a janitress. I migrated so that my children can study. My daughter is 15, she studies in class 9. But my son who is 9 works in a *kirana* shop [local grocery shop] as we need the money due to our financial situation. The working and living conditions here are good but I am here out of necessity. I cannot go back to India now as I do not have enough money saved up as yet.

Both Farhana's and Rigzen's stories depicts how migration often follows a singular track and does not change based on external circumstances. The migrant remains in the country under any condition until her primary purpose is fulfilled. However, there are others who have simply not thought about going back to India. For them migration has become a way of life, with return to India being a possibility in the distant future. Over the years, they have acclimatised themselves to their circumstances, hoping to stay and earn for as long as they possibly can.

Family obligation is another factor that largely influences the migration plans of women. They tend to morph their decisions based on the needs of the family. While the articulation of their plans varied, they were all supported by the common denominator of promoting family welfare and prospects. Alisha's migration plan shows that many women stay on in the UAE till they no longer need to support their children.

I worked in Muscat earlier. I migrated to UAE after my husband died as I have two children to provide for. My son is in class 12 while my daughter is in class 10. I am here out of necessity. I will go back to India when my son gets a job and when my daughter gets married.

Another leading factor that dictates change in migratory plans is children's education. Several women who live in the UAE with their family decide to move back to India or migrate to another country based on the betterment of their children's educational prospects. This is particularly pronounced in the UAE due to a lack of higher education institutes. Therefore, in such a case, migration is a household strategy in which the children's future is given utmost priority.

Contrary to popular perception, women do not decide about their future plans based solely on the socio-political and economic climate of the country. They in fact work around these hindrances in order to fulfil their migration objectives. Women exercise their agency and autonomy to prioritise certain aspects of their life. As a consequence, they choose to stay in the place that enhances these aspects, all the rest is then about sacrifice and ambivalence (Osella & Osella, 2008).

CONCLUSION

A woman juggles several roles together during her stay overseas, that of an employee, an economic provider, a transnational mother and a migrant. Based on conventional normative expectations, these roles are antithetical to one another, creating a moral panic within the household and amongst the community at large. Despite the significant role played by migrant women as the economic provider of the family, gendered expectations remain unchanged. She is expected to cater to the emotional needs of the family and often bears the burden of family disintegration due to her perceived contraventions of social norms. As a source of economic and social remittances, common sense would

dictate an increased value of a woman's labour. However, when viewed by the narrow spectrum through which gendered roles are defined, migrant women continue to hold disadvantaged positions. The absence of the woman becomes normalised, a process through which the spender of the money gains greater status than the earner herself. Further, the restricted interaction of participants with women of other nationalities and cultures has resulted in them learning new skills and practices without any changes in old habits or ideas. This has prevented them from attempting any break from patriarchy. Rather, they shape their migration decisions in a way that edges around the confines of patriarchy.

Nonetheless, when viewed comprehensively, all their decisions are made by exercising their agency. While women mould their plans for the future based on the wellbeing of their family, they do this based on their discretion, often in opposition to the views of the family and community. While they encounter injustice and hardships during their migration trajectory, they view their migration in a positive and hopeful light, as long as they achieve their stated objectives. Very few women regret their decision to migrate, most are content with their achievements and the contribution they have made in improving the lives of their family.

NOTES

[1]Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the women concerned.

[2]Circular migration refers to the temporary, recurrent movement of people between two or more countries mainly for the purpose of work or study.

[3]Following the example of several Middle Eastern and North African countries, the UAE banned VoIP services including Skype, WhatsApp calling and Facetime. While the UAE's telecom providers introduced paid-for calling applications, their high monthly subscription charges put them beyond the reach of many, particularly migrant workers.

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