The context: Over the last decade, the share of women migrant workers in Nepal has increased. Population census of 2011 shows that about 13% of the absentee population is composed of women. The system of kafala (sponsorship) has been heavily criticised for creating opportunities for the exploitation of workers. Feminist cultural geography has been important in understanding the nuances of the migratory experience.

Women’s migration journey:

Prior to migration:
- 64% just literate
- 56% victims of child marriage

Major issues:
- Workload
- Non-payment
- Withholding food
- Abuse - Sexual, Physical, Verbal
- Restricted contact to family

Conquering independence:

After migration:
- 2008 to 2014
- More than 2,000,000 permits issued by Gov’t of Nepal.
- 2012 to 2015
- Temporary ban lifted by Gov’t of Nepal on women’s migration.
- 2016
- Last ban by Gov’t of Nepal lifted.

Major issues:
- Problems such as drudgery and long working hours including long night shifts have been reported.
- Workload.
- Non-payment.
- Withholding food.
- Abuse - Sexual, Physical, Verbal
- Restricted contact to family

The narratives on migrant women oscillate between portraying them as... or... has often been termed as a gender-neutral phenomenon.

HUMAN RIGHTS!

Victims

Heroinas

But, stepping away from these binaries...

Prior to migration:
- “The demand for my services in various community committee meetings increased. I was able to manage more because I was able to purchase a motorcycle. I can now ride a motorcycle to reach my destination.”

Decisions making:
- “Strategic thinking” and decision making have developed inner confidence

Financial Independence:
- Some returnees have not only gained financial, but gained employment in male-dominated sectors such as tourist guides.

Remitted money is invested in education, for themselves as well younger girls.

Decision making:
- “Without proper education, there was very little that I could do to help financially in providing a good education to my children. That was the reason why I went for foreign employment.”

Challenge gender stereotypes, and purchase a motorbike:
- “Upon my return, I have solved and prevented family feuds with my strategic thinking...My father-in-law has come to respect this, and now consults me not only on family feuds, but also on community issues.”

Conquering independencebreaking stereotypes:

- “When you come back to your husband, father and brother for even small amounts of money to purchase a packet of salt or a bangle, there is never going to be empowerment. It is important to have financial independence...”

Some returnees have not only gained financial, but gained employment in male-dominated sectors such as tourist guides.

Infographic created with help from PaperUX. Source: “Neither Heroines, nor Victims: Women Migrant Workers and Changing Family and Community Relations in Nepal” by Giovanna Gioli, Amina Maharjan and Manju Gurung. /hiaware hi_aware