

NEITHER HEROINES NOR VICTIMS

LABOR MIGRATION

...has often been termed as a gender-neutral phenomenon.



However, over the last decade, the share of women migrant workers in Nepal has increased.

13%

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



The narratives on migrant women oscillate between portraying them as...

VICTIMS

of global economic restructuring, a vulnerable group among the streams of poor migrants from the Global South

or

HEROINES

Because of the alleged altruistic nature of their remitting habits they are considered...

BUT, STEPPING AWAY FROM THESE BINARIES...



Feminist cultural geography has been important in understanding the nuances of the migratory experience.

THE CONTEXT

2008 to 2014

Remittance amount equates to almost 30% of Nepal's GDP

1990s

Since 1990s the Gulf and Malaysia have become major destinations for Nepali migrants.

More than 2,000,000 permits issued by Gov't of Nepal.

2012 to 2015

Temporary bans imposed by Gov't of Nepal on women's migration

Last ban by Gov't of Nepal lifted.

2016

WOMEN'S MIGRATION JOURNEY (MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAPER)

Prior to migration

64% just literate

motivated by providing a good future for their children

88%

After migration

34% faced gender based violence

56% victims of child marriage

"Social life in the Gulf starts at 10 pm, which is already past the sleeping time back home. So adjusting to this new life is extremely difficult as, even if allowed, we could simply not sleep during the day"

Problems such as drudgery and long working hours including long night shifts have been reported



Major issues

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

CONQUERING INDEPENDENCE BREAKING STEREOTYPES

EDUCATION



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

"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"

MOBILITY

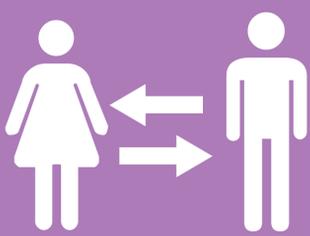
"The demand for my services in various community committees started to increase...I could not manage to walk, hence I have purchased a motorbike. I am the first and only woman to ride a motorbike"



Challenge gender stereotypes, and purchase a motorbike

DECISION MAKING

"Strategic thinking" and decision making have developed inner confidence



"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"

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

"...when one has to depend on 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.