

Gender and South Asian Migration Challenges and Way Forward

Anisur Rahman* and Niharika Tiwari**

Abstract

Gender and migration are two significant developments leading to multi-dimensional changes across the world. This paper aims to discuss international migration, especially the migration of women from South Asia. It will also examine how the feminist objective of gender equality affects international migration and gets influenced by it. It is evident that we currently live in a situation where labour migration has become an integral part of globalization, and gender distribution among migrants today is reasonably balanced, with almost 50 per cent of the global migrant population today being women. The rationale behind this research paper is to identify the areas where feminist and migrant discourses interact with each other. Since the notion of feminism has evolved multi dimensionally, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender (LGBT) group is also being discussed under gender discourse. This paper will focus on the role and status of women to develop a meticulous analysis.

* Anisur Rahman, Professor & Director, UGC-HRDC, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi
Email ID: arahman@jmi.ac.in

**Niharika Tiwari, Assistant Professor, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Prayagraj
Email ID: niharikatiwari15@gmail.com

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Introduction

The movement of people across and within borders has intensified due to the forces of globalization. People have migrated from one place to another in search of better options of livelihood (McAuliffe and Khadria, 2019, Chan,2020). With the increasing number of women in the migration process, women-specific issues have come to the forefront because a person's gender identity and sexual preferences shape every stage of the migration experiences of their life (Jones, 2020). This exponential growth in historical process of South Asian migration needs to be analysed from the new approaches and perspectives that try to de/re-construct deep-rooted inequality and discrimination based on the ascribed status of the people involved (Bose,2021).A gender-based analysis of the patterns and issues of migration examines the inbuilt inequalities. It goes beyond ordinary differences in migration behaviour between men and women, such as the livelihood, working conditions, aspirations and types of migration. It looks at how the decision taken by women about their migration is shaped by different contexts and conditions (Jones, 2020).The feminist perspective tries to delve into the deep-seated inequalities because of gender bias that often makes migration a complex process especially for women.

The feminist movements and migration both have made inroads into the corridors of power worldwide. Almost all the countries of the world get influenced by the feminist movements and migrants. According to Bonifacio

(2012), for immigrant women, new cultural modalities in host societies offer many ways to challenge, transform, or negotiate traditional prescriptions of womanhood, women's work, and identities, among others. From 1980, existing literature illustrates and research increasingly shows that, women to the forefront has brought lot of attention. It has also claimed to observe a rising trend globally towards the feminisation of migration. According to IOM;

“Gender influences reasons for migrating, who migrates and where, how people migrate, the networks they use, opportunities and resources available at destinations, and relations with the country of origin. Risks, vulnerabilities and needs are shaped mainly by gender and often vary drastically for different groups. The roles, expectations, relationships and power dynamics associated with being a man, woman, boy or girl, and whether one identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBT), significantly affect all aspects of the migration process and can also be affected in new ways by migration” (IOM, 2019).

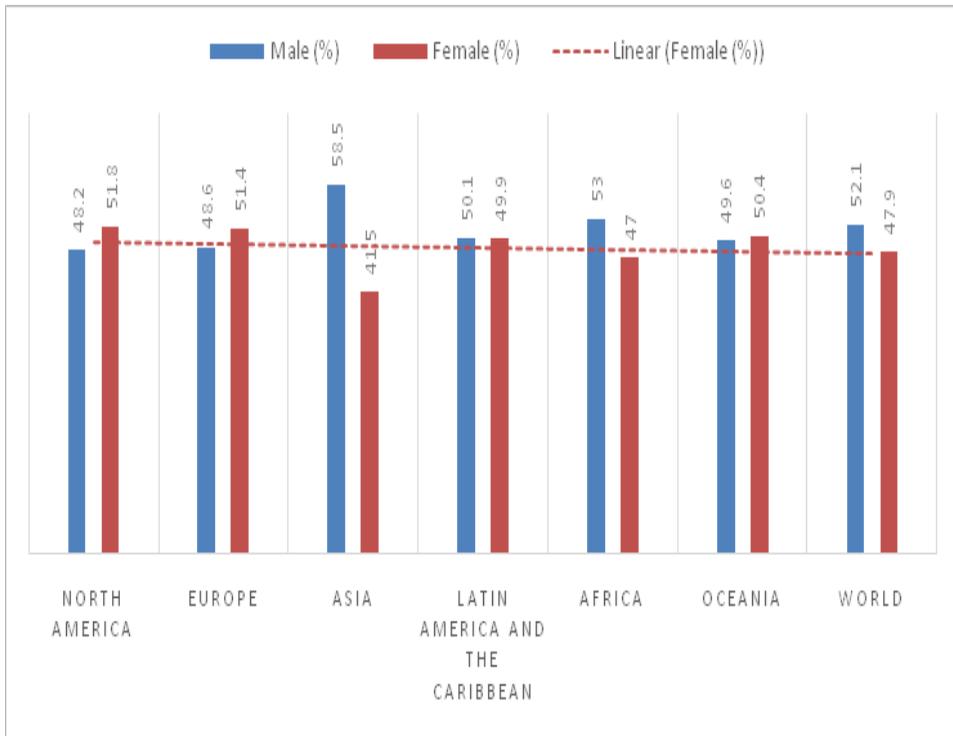
Migration is understood as “a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence of an individual or a group of people” (Oderth 2002, 2). Migration also involves different flux like “international, frontier wise, rural-urban, urban-urban, intra-urban, and circulation”(Johnston et al. 2000,504). To outline the scholarly framework between feminism and migration in South Asia, this paper will confine migration to international mobility because it demonstrates the consequences of the impact on feminism as a concept and women's life in practice. Migration and feminism may emerge divergent in their track in various popular debates. Still, detailed analysis by contemporary scholarship illustrates burgeoning aspects of probing between the two with solid points of convergence.

Table 1: Percentage of International Male/Female Migrants in terms of Region, 2019

Region	Male %	Female %
North America	48.2	51.8
Europe	48.6	51.4
Asia	58.5	41.5
Latin America and The Caribbean	50.1	49.9
Africa	53	47
Oceania	49.6	50.4
World	52.1	47.9

Source: Migration Data Portal, 2019 Available at: <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/gender>

This table illustrates that women constitute a large percentage of those who are migrating. In North America, Europe and to a certain extent in the Oceania region, women outnumber men. Except in Asia in all other regions, women's share is more than 47 per cent. This trend seems encouraging as the mobility of women seems to have increased as per 2019 data. However, many areas within this process hinder the participation of women.

Figure 1: International Male/ Female Migrants 2019 (in percentage)

Source: (Figure generated from table1) Migration Data Portal, 2019 Available at: <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/gender>

It is noticed that out of 243 million people who represented 3% of the world population of migrants in 2015, roughly 50% were women. Now, we are witnessing women migrating, not only as a part of a family but independently for education or employment and income, which is sometimes referred to as “feminisation of migration”. It becomes crucial to find specific correlation corridors of global migration; for instance, a lot of migration happening

from South Asia to the Gulf or the South East Asian countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, and other parts of the world.

According to UNFPA, due to five primary reasons, it can be argued that migration is a feminist issue. These five factors are: first; more than half of the migrants are girls and women. These women are highly immigrating single (alone) or as principle bread earners of their households. Second, female migrants face significant risks, including sexual exploitation, trafficking and violence. Third, migrant women face double discrimination as women and as migrants. Fourth, women do not stop getting pregnant when they are on the move. Fifth, these women and girl migrants may face issues related to health, both during transit and at their destinations. South Asian Region has been a source, transit and destination for women migrating for employment. This paper delves into socio-political restrictions and challenges that affect women's mobility and migration patterns in South Asia. The paper also highlights feminist perspectives, the notion of gender, strategies that promote migration and violence and exploitation at various stages of migration.

Understanding Gender

Gender discourse has evolved over a period of time, beginning with the issues related to the male-female binary up to LGBTQs. As an academic discourse, it has emphasized that people with different sexual orientations have equal cerebral capacity. The word feminism has a very controversial interpretation. In her seminal work, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Wolf emphasized that the Right to earn a living is the essential Right of women. According to Margaret Walters (2005), women in some countries may have

dissimilar exposure and definitions.

Despite all debates and abstractions, broadly, there are four waves of feminism. The concept of feminism needs to be discussed here to understand the idea of feminisation of migration. Women's enfranchisement through the vote, access to professions, and the right to own property were all fundamental to *the first wave of feminism*. The second generation of feminists advocated for "freedom from patriarchal oppression." The centre of a struggle for the first wave of feminism was the Right to vote. They consider economic deprivation, social and political inequality the main reason for women's deprivation. The metaphor of *the Glass ceiling* is essential to third-wave feminism. While the *Fourth Wave Feminism* focuses on social media, street and workplace harassment, campus sexual assault and rape culture etc.

Ideologically, Liberal feminists consider denial of equal rights to women as the sole cause of their deprivation. Marxist feminists, on the other hand, contend that men's dominance over women is a result of capital's dominance over labour. On the other hand, Dual System Theorists make capitalist-patriarchal society responsible for gender bias. Third world feminists emphasise that patriarchy and race, class, nation and ethnic divisions also play a decisive role in making women subservient. In contemporary studies, the process of migration has been understood as a gendered activity because women have to face a myriad of difficulties due to the existing gendered social norms, traditions and cultures at the workplace. According to Morrison et al. (2008), we need a coherent framework to study the gendered aspect of migration. They argue:

There are few empirical studies focusing on differences in international migration determinants, remittances, and impacts between the sexes. They often lack grounding in economic theory or the use of appropriate instruments to enable one to identify gender effects reliably. Critical pieces of the gender-and-international-migration puzzle largely have been ignored. These include differences between males and females concerning the opportunity costs of migration; the influences of migration and remittances on household investments, production and technology choices, and expenditures; and the linkages that transmit migration influences through migrant-sending economies (Morrison et al., 2008, p.38).

Therefore, the linkages between gender and international migration need to be explored and analysed.

Migration

Migration is the reality of today's world. There are more international migrants today than before. Almost all the countries of the world get affected by the process of migration. It is interlinked with many other issues at the global level, such as poverty, human trafficking, human rights, gender and multiculturalism etc. Migration affects the economic development of the regions in general and countries in particular.

There is a difference between migrants, refugees and those human beings who are trafficked. The word 'migrants' stands for the people moving for reasons not included in the legal definition. 'Refugees' are the people fleeing war or persecution across an international border whereas, victims of trafficking are considered victims of a crime under international law. According to OHCHR an international migrant is defined as "any individual who is outside a State of which they are a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, their State of birth or habitual abode," according to the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

(OHCHR). According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the term “migrant” is used as a neutral term to designate a group of persons who do not have citizenship status in their host nation. It is unaffected by international law’s protection regimes for specific legal categories of individuals, such as refugees, stateless people, trafficking people, and migrant workers.

According to the International Labour Organization, migration for employment can contribute to development in countries of origin through remittances, return migration, and transnational community participation (Diaspora). Human capital, financial capital (savings), and social capital are all brought back by return migrants (contacts and access to networks). Return migrants and the Diaspora aid the creation of new markets, the formation of commercial linkages (between countries of origin and destination), technology transfer, and economic and political reforms in their home countries. As remitters, return migrants, and transnational entrepreneurs, women migrants play an important role in these fields. The significant increase in monetary remittances demonstrates the favourable impact of labour migration on poverty reduction and economic and social development. It has been observed by eminent scholars (Morrison, Schiff, and Sjöblom, 2008) that the process, cause and effects of migration all are gendered.

Feminization of Migration

The term ‘*feminization of Migration*’ gained currency in the migration discourse when the United Nations in 2007 published their working paper exclusively covering the phenomenon that deals with the gendering of mi-

gration. The term denotes an increase in the share of female migrants in comparison to male migrants. It is noted that some scholars also hold the view that female migration in a time frame is to describe their recent patterns and trends, while some scholars, on the other hand, are critical of their absolute increase in comparison to their male counterparts. There is scant literature available about the linkages between feminism and migration. However, efforts are being made to establish the points of convergence. As far as feminism is concerned, it argues that gender is a social construct. Its epistemology is the patriarchal structure of the society manifested in almost every aspect of life. When one analyses the impact of feminism, it has been observed that at the academic level, feminism and migration are closely interlinked. In contrast, its impact on those women who are migrating is not established, as migrants have their socio-economic limitations, with poor education and limited knowledge about their rights.

While feminisation of migration is reasonably recognised in contemporary migration scholarship, the relationship between feminism and migration is not. This means that while women's migration is well-documented from various disciplinary perspectives, feminism as a form of practice in their lives is not quite established (Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, 2012: page 2)

In recent years, the number of international migrants has risen steadily, reaching 258 million in 2017, up from 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000(?). Over 60% of all international migrants (80 million) dwell in Asia or Europe (78 million). India (17 million international migrants) was the most populous country of origin in 2017, followed by Mexico (17 million) (13 million). Women make up just over half of all overseas migrants. In 2017, female migrants made up 48% of all migrants. Female migrants

outnumber male migrants in Europe. However, in Asia and Africa, the share of females was less than half of North American Oceans, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Three prominent reasons have induced this phenomenon in the last few decades. Firstly, the demand for female labour has increased in some economic sectors in some countries, especially in health care services. Secondly, today women are more educated, qualified and socially more independent than before to make their choices to migrate more rather than depending on their husbands. Lastly, though women had been migrating as domestic workers, their professional profile has been witnessing a change, and there is also an upward trend due to marriage. The pace at which the women migrate raises policy concerns for the policymakers both in-home and host countries regarding their safety, security and human rights. The fear of trafficking in the name of economic opportunities remains a serious concern.

Gendered Dimensions of International Migration

Due to the enhanced awareness about gender equality generated by international organizations like United Nations, NGOs, and other civil society mediums, efforts are being made by the agencies like International Labour Organization (ILO) and sovereign nation-states to address the issues that are exclusively related to women. However, the process of international migration is very much gendered. Women face many challenges. Some of them are structural, and others are situational. For instance, the most crucial aspect is the gendered mindset of the people that makes women more

vulnerable. Apart from this, the kind of work women is expected to do is also discriminatory and low paid. Women workers are demanded for the work that often includes care work, domestic service, sex and cheap labour. Human trafficking is also one of the challenges for those who migrate, and women are one of the soft targets. According to ILO;

The global segregation of labour markets predominantly affects the types of work available to both men and women migrant workers. Whereas many economic sectors are open for men, migrant workers are heavily concentrated in female-dominated occupations, often the services sector. And these occupations are most commonly associated with traditional gender roles. There is an increasing demand for women migrant workers of all skill levels for care-giving jobs.

Women are often preferred as domestic workers. Added to this, women have to suffer based on their gender at the place of origin while fleeing and at the destination due to the gendered structural violence that is an integral part of the socio-economic system worldwide. According to ILO, migrant women are discriminated against on the following grounds:

Women migrant workers can accumulate numerous levels of discrimination

Sex: as women workers vis-à-vis men workers.

Race, colour and ethnicity: in labour market situations where the principle of “equal treatment and opportunities” is not applied, mainly in women migrant workers belonging to a certain ethnic or racial group vis-à-vis the racial or ethnic origin of the majority of the population.

Occupation: performing jobs where they are not formally considered workers.

Wages: performing jobs where the principle of “equal pay for equal work” is not applied.

Nationality: as foreign workers vis-à-vis nationals. - Migration status: as undocumented vis-à-vis documented.

ILO has identified the gender dimensions of migration where women suffer owing to the social norms and traditions that are gendered and undermine the potential and importance of women at large. According to Ghosh (2009), gender division of labour is a common phenomenon in international migration. She has highlighted the fact that women often fail to negotiate a more equal division of labour within the household framework; consequently, social reproduction remains their primary responsibility. Added to this she has pointed out that migrant women workers are often found as the victims of unequal access to basic public services such as health, education and maternity benefits etc.

According to World Migration Report (2020), the international migrant worker population is not only gendered but is geographically concentrated

as well. Male migrants outweigh female migrants globally. With a gender composition that sees many more men in low- and lower-middle-income nations than women. In contrast to gender splits in high-income countries. Northern America, the Arab States, and Northern, Southern, and Western Europe accounted for 99.6 million migrant workers, or over 61 percent of all migrant workers. Notably, there is a remarkable gender imbalance among migrant workers in two regions: Southern Asia (6 million males vs. 1.3 million females) and the Arab States (1.3 million males vs. 1.3 million females) (19.1 million males compared with 3.6 million females).

The Arab States region is one of the most popular locations for migrant workers, as it allows them to control vital industries. Migrant labourers make up over 95 percent of the construction and domestic labour force in the Gulf States, for example. Between 2013 and 2017, the number of migrant workers in Arab countries increased by more than 5%, mainly to rising demand for male migrant workers, many of whom work in manual labour, mostly in the construction industry.

Gendered Migration from South Asia

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the eight countries that make up the South Asian region. Migrants have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, which has increased their vulnerabilities across all sectors,' according to the migration data portal. COVID-19 provoked a huge migration of several million Southern Asian migrant workers from their host nations to their countries of origin due to large-scale job losses, income cutbacks, homelessness, and short-notice lockdowns in some countries (IOM, 2020a). As far as the pat-

tern of migration is concerned, this Region has intra-regional, inter-regional and international migration. Countries in South Asia have many common features in their migration profile. For instance, deepening employment crisis, socio-political tensions and unequal distribution of resources are the prime factors responsible for increased migration from South Asia. Moreover, in this Region, the geostrategic positioning of the countries also makes the process of migration a bit more complex. The absence of sufficient socio-economic prospects in home nations, such as pervasive poverty, leads to a desire for a better future and higher remuneration in the destination country in the context of South Asia. These variables are true for women migrating from South Asia, albeit the influence of these factors differs by country.

The scope and direction of women's movement from Sri Lanka are all factors in the feminization of migration in South Asia. Around 80% to 90% of Sri Lankan women travel to work as domestic workers. The demographics of female migrants provide insight into the elements that influence migration on a micro level. Currently, the movement of women workers from Sri Lanka is linked to the availability of domestic worker jobs in the West Asian region.

Women's migration from Nepal follows a different pattern. Prior to the 1990s, migration was frequently viewed as a male-dominated process, with women acting as facilitators for their spouses, parents, or relatives. Women migrant workers were inhibited from moving independently due to ingrained patriarchal beliefs, a lack of reliable and easily accessible networks, and a financial element. However, after a very significant development in

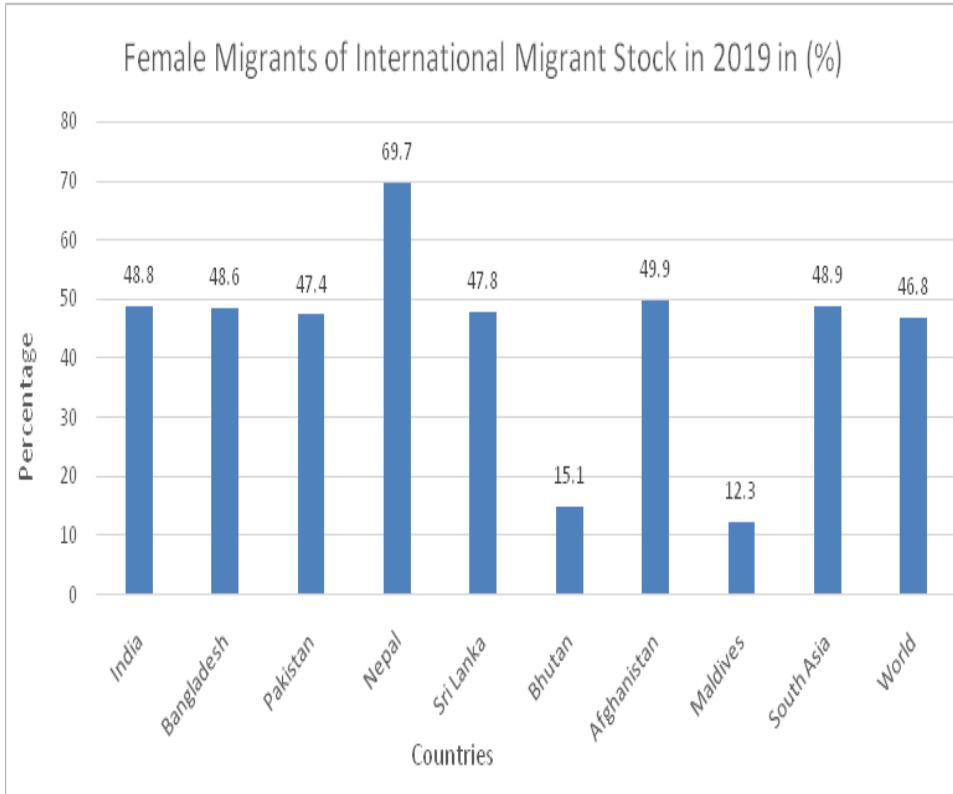
the 1990s that led to the change in the political organization of the country from that of a monarchy to a democracy, women also felt empowered and started raising their voices to ensure at least a small place in the areas of policymaking and welfare programmes. The following table shows the country wise composition of female migration in South Asia and the world.

Table 2: Female Migrants (Percentage of International Migrant Stock)

Countries	2010	2015	2019
India	48.7	48.8	48.8
Bangladesh	47.2	47.1	48.6
Pakistan	47.4	48.9	47.4
Nepal	67.2	69.3	69.7
Sri Lanka	46.9	47.8	47.8
Bhutan	18.9	18.9	15.1
Afghanistan	43.6	49.3	49.9
Maldives	23.7	12.3	12.3
South Asia	42.9	42.8	48.9
World	47.0	46.9	46.8

Source: World Bank Gender Statistics, 2021

Figure 2: Female Migrants(Percentage of International Migrant stock in 2019)



Source: World Bank Gender Statistics

The above table and chart illustrate that Nepal is the leading female migration, followed by Afghanistan. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka also send a large chunk of female migrants. Maldives and Bhutan are the ones that send a small number of female migrants. However, as a region, South Asia shares 48.9 per cent of female migrants as per data available in 2019. Female migration from South Asia has its specific features directly

related to the patriarchal structure of the society.

The recently introduced Family Background Report (FBR) system in Sri Lanka stipulates that the women obtain clearance from a local official. Due to restrictive practices, women's migration (especially international migration) is considerably low in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. In other countries (Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) such restrictions are found, prompting employment-aspiring women to take illegal routes. Often, these undocumented migrants fall prey to pernicious practices of illegal recruiters, including trafficking and sexual abuse.

In terms of female migration, the Gulf region has traditionally had strong and long-standing linkages with South Asia, both in terms of trade and people mobility. The recent surge in labour migration to the Gulf region must be viewed in the context of the long-term trend of international migration in the globalization age, notably since 1991.

Women from Sri Lanka made up two-thirds of migrant workers in 2002. According to studies, the employment of Sri Lankan housemaids in Gulf countries is linked to the migration of women workers from Sri Lanka. According to figures from 2009, women made up 51.73 percent of all Sri Lankan expatriates, with 89 percent working as housemaids. This grouping of female migrants reveals information about the micro-level elements that cause migration. India also sends women migrants, specifically from Kerala, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh, who are mostly employed in skilled and semi-skilled sectors in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC countries).

In the context of Nepal, the migration of women workforce is not directly linked to the oil boom signifying the process of migration to the Gulf countries. Here, factors like poverty, inequality have been a driving force

for international migration. Women labour constitutes around 5 per cent of the share of the women labour force in the Gulf (Nepal Institute of Development Studies, 2010). Moreover, the other South Asian countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives have relatively low data on International Migration.

West Asia hosts the most significant number of international female migrants. However, it is essential to note that proportion of female migrants' stock is much less when compared to male migrants. Within South Asia, Nepal has the most feminized migrant stock. It is followed by Sri Lanka and then India.

Today, in the globalized world, the role of women has been diversified by the process of migration. Increased household income, improved access to education, health care, and the empowerment of women are all positive effects of migration on human development. The effects are visible in terms of their financial independence on the one hand. On the other hand, female migrants play an active role in developing their home country's economy. Similarly, regarding women left behind when their husbands migrate, their position has undoubtedly improved. They manage the household in their absence, but with the remittances, they make independent financial choices beneficial to their family. In contrast to men, they invest more in education and health-related activities. Even various studies have pointed out that women have been remitting more than their male counterparts though they are positioned in the lower rung of the job hierarchy. They are mainly employed in low skilled, low paid jobs, for example, in domestic and health care services.

Women migrants sent 62 percent of total remittances to Sri Lanka in 1999, accounting for more than half of the country's trade balance. Women in the Philippines contributed 6.2 billion dollars in 2001 (Kawar, 2004). In Nepal, the women migrants sent 50 per cent of workers remittances and contributed to GDP. In addition, one could argue that the gendered aspect of migration works in two ways, one for the country of origin, when the gender migrates, and secondly, to the host country, where they work. It is noteworthy that women have played an essential role in mitigating poverty in their respective countries of origin. But there is a shortage of literature on this particular aspect. Hence more studies are required to substantiate the argument.

Significant Challenges Faced by South Asian Women Migrants

South Asian women have to face multiple challenges while opting for migration as this Region has deep-rooted patriarchy and patriarchal norms that are debilitating for women. Added to this vicious circle of poverty, poor governance leading to discrimination and the importance of the society over the individual creates several challenges for the women migrating from South Asia to various parts of the world. Human trafficking, human rights violations, poor health facilities, especially for those women who are lactating and have a menstrual cycle. There is no appropriate facility for them.

Civil Wars and Conflicts

South Asia has been witnessing civil wars and a myriad of conflicts in the Region. Women are forced to migrate due to increased violence and exploitation. For instance, during ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka and political

instability in Nepal, women were forced to migrate. According to South Asia Women's Fund Report (2016);

Conflict-related displacement has fueled migration across the Region. For instance, within Nepal's conflict and post-conflict environment, many women displaced by the Nepalese civil war (1996-2006) entered the entertainment sector, including working in restaurants, bars, massage parlours, and sex workers. Forced migration in Sri Lanka has also been associated with two decades of civil war and its aftermath that prompted Tamils to migrate worldwide.

When women are forced to migrate, they often get lower wages due to their vulnerabilities in their country of origin. Apart from this, the mental trauma they face while leaving their place also lowers their confidence and their struggle with it.

South Asian Women and Trafficking

Women are often forced into the prostitution business in which many women are exploited to earn money and some other profits. Enforced prostitution is also a kind of violence that is hardly noticed by society. Most of the women are imported for this business from foreign countries. Women from low-income families often become an easy target of such groups and are forced into the prostitution business in the name of providing work to them.

To stop these exploitations, few international preventions and International Conventions such as the United Nations 1949 'Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others' (UNHCR) and 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women come into existence. There are also some regional instruments which include SAARC Convention on Prevention and

Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. This directly prohibits the human trafficking of women and children (Rahman, 2015). Despite such international laws, human trafficking in South Asia has been continuously increasing day by day.

It is noted that more than 1,50,000 people are affected by human trafficking. Bangladesh, Nepal and India are the worst affected countries in South Asia. For instance, since 2013, human trafficking from Nepal has increased to 500 percent, in 2018. The government of Nepal has officially announced that about 2,00,000 Nepali women are working in the brothels of India. India is the primary destination of trafficking in the Region. The Bangladeshi government has also admitted that “a few thousand women and girls have been trafficked to South Asian countries, particularly to India and the West Asian countries for labour, prostitution and other purposes” (Cheema, 2014). For the captured women, it’s challenging to escape from their organized net of the prostitution business. If any of these women somehow manage to escape from them, it is challenging to reach their home country without any passport and legal documents. So, these women in South Asia continued to be exploited by the prostitution rackets.

Only a very few lucky women manage to escape from the humiliating life of enforced prostitution. It is tough to grab such groups because of many reasons. One of the leading causes is the ineffective measures to control women in trafficking by the authorities to stop the organizers of enforced prostitution business (Mishra, 2002). It is a time for South Asian Countries to take strict measures to stop human trafficking by providing them employment to low-income family women and girls and rehabilitating the victims

of the enforced prostitution.

Issue of Human Rights

West Asian countries, mainly the GCC countries, are the primary recipients of migrants from South Asia (except for Bhutan and the Maldives). In construction, domestic and care labour, the South Asia–Gulf corridor is characterized by unskilled temporary contract workers. Women’s migration to the Region has expanded dramatically in the previous two decades, particularly in service-related sectors such as domestic work and health care. Sri Lanka is the largest source of female migrants to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Housemaid migration to Gulf countries surged in the 1990s before declining in the first decade of this century.

Compared to the migration of professionals and high-skilled workers, the migration of unskilled workers and housemaids has increased from Sri Lanka. One cannot deny the fact that the percentage share of women as the independent workforce has increased. They have become a focal point of migration research and lead to coining the term feminization of migration. But, their mere presence in these sectors makes them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation since they are primarily engaged in low skilled jobs. Seeking employment opportunities in the Region was somehow perceived as a measure to run away from oppressed societal hierarchies. Most unskilled female workforce hails from Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. There is no doubt that migrant workforces have not only become an important developmental actor, but they have been able to come up from their oppressed hierarchies that have engulfed them for centuries.

The Gulf case becomes an essential point of reference here owing to the temporary nature of migrants to the Region. So, return migration is also a matter of concern and causes a problem for the home country. However, it is interesting to know that the percentage share of female return migrants is much lower than the male returnees. Hence, this particular aspect shows the persistent demand for women in sectors like health care and domestic services. Migration involves high-risk factors and poor employment conditions. Therefore, ILO is working in close association with South Asian countries to generate policies to reduce the vulnerability of migrant's workers, particularly of women and girls. Furthermore, ILO linked the process of migration with Human Security.

Socio-cultural Stigmatization

Migrating women face heightened social stigma and prejudices whenever they come back to their country of origin. Cultural discourse and ideological norms restrict women from enjoying their life. They are sometimes looked down on by society because, in South Asia, good women still live inside the house and fulfil household duties. They have to face several questions put forward by society, and they are scrutinized by the lenses based on patriarchal norms and values.

Apart from these stumbling blocks, one favourable trend in South Asia is that earlier women migrants were forced to migrate due to adverse conditions and domestic levels. Now migration has emerged as an alternative to fulfil their dreams. Women are willingly migrating for better life opportunities. To protect the rights of women migrant's workers, a series of instru-

ments have been developed, which are as follows:

The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CTM, 1990) is the first and most important tool for safeguarding this social category. The CTM guarantees human rights to migrants based on the concept of equality for all people. As a result, regardless of the group's status as migrants, it provides access to human rights.

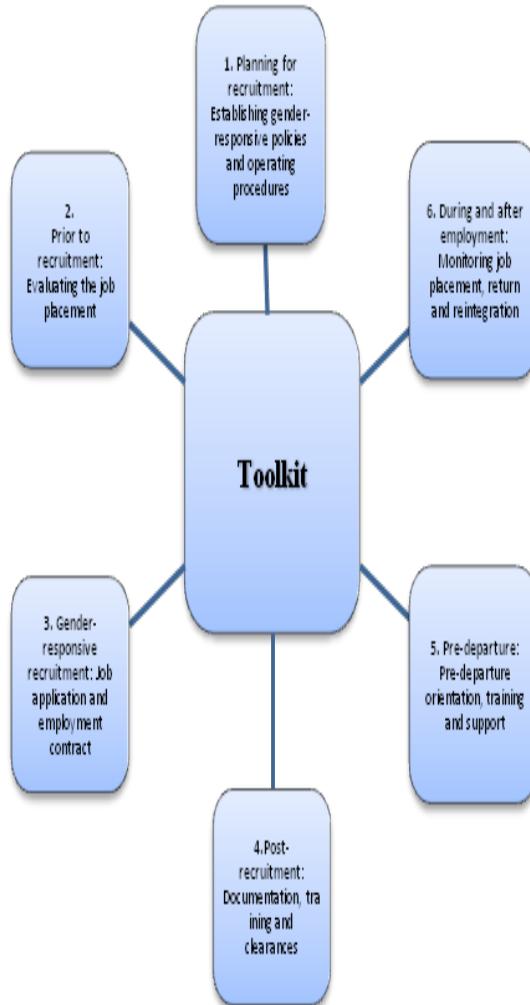
The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) provides lasting solutions for gender-based discrimination and exclusion irrespective of ethnicity, economic situation, nationality, age, occupation, etc. The CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 (2008) discusses the circumstances and challenges that contribute to and enhance the particular vulnerability of many migrant women and their experiences of gender- and sex-based discrimination. It also identifies this vulnerability in terms of cause and a consequence of violating their fundamental human rights.

Several International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions provide as additional safeguards for the rights of women migrant workers. After being ratified by States, the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) (2011), a crucial tool related to domestic migrant workers, contributes to ensuring the rights of female citizens as well as migrant women hired as domestic assistance.

UN Women has also launched a Toolkit to assist the migrant women of South Asia. This self-assessment tool is recommended to actors involved in labour migration, including government, employers, and recruitment agencies, by

the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The tool outlines a set of principles and actions that can be implemented on a voluntary basis to effectively integrate gender sensitivity into the migration process. Employers and recruitment agencies that use this tool will be better able to satisfy the demands of women in the workplace. Recruitment that is inclusive, gender-responsive, and ethical is a win-win situation for both workers and employers, as well as countries of origin and destination.

Figure 3: Tool-kit by UNWOMEN



Source: Empowering Women Migrant Workers from South Asia: Toolkit for Gender-Responsive Employment and Recruitment. UN Women, Asia and

Pacific, 2019. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/03/empowering-women-migrant-workers-from-south-asia>

Patriarchy of migration has been manifested in the form of low wages paid to women migrants, stereotyping while allocating jobs to them in the host countries, for instance, women are often assigned caregiving tasks, they face harassment while moving to the country of destination, and all the above they have to fulfil double responsibilities, i.e. along with her work outside the home she has to fulfil her household duties. Furthermore, migrating women are protected by conventions, laws, and traditions safeguarding the rights of women and migrants in receiving nations. Women who are hired as domestic employees or who are unregistered workers in the country of destination, on the other hand, are particularly susceptible.

The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development makes several important recommendations for improving the situation of women who are migrants or refugees and those who have been the victims of trafficking. The survey urges governments to establish laws and programmes to improve migrant women's access to jobs, safe housing, education and language training, health care, and other services while they are legally present in their countries. They also urge all countries to ratify and implement all international legal instruments that promote and protect the rights of migrant women and girls, as well as to review and modify their national migration legislation and regulations to identify and eliminate discriminatory provisions, and to develop legal literacy programmes to promote a better understanding of women's human rights. It emphasizes the importance of conducting additional research and improving data gathering operations in

order to develop gender-sensitive and inclusive migration policies and programmes.

Conclusion

Female migrants constitute almost half of the total migrant workers. It is inevitable to stop their exploitation and vulnerabilities to maximize the benefits contributed by them. Time has now come to protect the rights of female migrants for making them more productive both for home and host countries. Female migrants from South Asia have to face poor living conditions and low wages due to the increased competition in the host country. Apart from this, the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the condition of the female migrant as domestic care giving is one of the prime areas migrating women are employed; due to this global pandemic, an economic crisis emerged, and people have started reducing the numbers of domestic care giving workers owing to their inability to pay them. Despite the conditions of vulnerability faced by the migrant female workforce from South Asia, it is noticed that female migrants have contributed significantly to the development process of their respective countries and the Gulf economy and society.

Henceforth, it can be argued that the increased feminization of the Gulf migration has positively impacted several countries of South Asia. At the micro-level, increasing remittances by female migrants has reframed the development narratives. The empowering aspects of female migration are also evident at the micro-level in labour sending countries where vital changes are taking place in the gender balance of power at the household and societal levels. However, suppose South Asian women are given access to quality

education and skill development and are aware of their rights as a migrant. In that case, it will undoubtedly enhance their socio-economic status in the coming future. Several issues like trafficking, poor wages, human rights violations and sexual exploitation etc., are witnessed by migrating South Asian women owing to lack of quality education and unawareness. Added to this, initiatives can be taken at the SAARC level to pursue the interests and safety of female migrants from South Asia.

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Endnotes

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