

Male Migration and Challenges to Gender Equality? A Study of Doaba Region of Punjab.

Atinder Pal Kaur

Research Scholar, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Introduction: Migration in simple words is “movement of people” but in reality it is strategically well-planned migration which is motivated by factors like financial enrichment and social welfare of the family members. The decision to migrate is rarely an individual’s sole decision rather it is reached at after collectively deciding upon the same so as to maximize the economic gains in the family and at the same time, to minimize the economic risk factors (Kanaiaupuni, 2000). In particular, remittances have increasingly been recognized as a potential development resource (Kapur, 2003) for family welfare. Households in labor-exporting societies use these remittances for improvement of standard of living and for economic mobility. Massey et.al, (1993) asserted that “*culture of migration*” often becomes a norm; a ritual and the main formulation of upward socio-economic mobility. Many studies have been done on effects of migration on migrants, their survival strategy, labor condition etc. But migration does not only influence those who migrate but also those who remain behind. One of the direct effects of migration can be seen upon those women who remain behind at native places after their husband’s migration. This period of their life is full of turmoil because lots of economic, social and cultural changes that affect their life, deeply. Migration of male members affects the life of left behind families thereby; bringing changes to the role and status of left behind women (Hadi, 2001). Abadan-Unat (1977) in a study of Turkish women, found that the women who remain behind have greater decision-making power in the home, especially when these women live in nuclear families. Absence of male figure in the family subsequently pushes the left behind women to interact with organizations and institutions (banks and government agencies) they were not used to interacting with before migration. While greater autonomy for women is overall advantageous for them, there have also been several documented negative impacts of men’s labour migration on women who remain behind (Roy and Nangia 2005). In the absence of men, women become responsible for both, their own and their husband’s duties, and roles (Khaled 1995). Labour migration, when successful, is an economic benefit to families but families can experience greater economic hardship if migrant men cannot secure good employment (Sadiqi and Ennaji 2004). Women married to such migrants who fail to fetch rewarding jobs off shores

may experience huge financial burden due to multiple responsibilities imposed upon them. In other words, women may experience increased autonomy, yet they still might face large gender inequalities at the household and societal level due to the vast magnitude of these disparities (Yabiku et al., 2010). Zachariah & Rajan (2015) made observation that those women who earlier had restricted lifestyle and couldn't take charge of household and outdoor work before their husband's migration, are now pushed by circumstances to open their bank account and deal with public officers to avail variety of services. This paper is an attempt to understand such women's position while gathering information from diverse literature of Africa, Latin America, Europe and Asia. Even though diversity persists in these countries but all findings largely point towards a common status of women. After studying long review of literature, one thing is noticeable that male migrations have both positive and negative effects on family spheres of women who remain behind, that cannot be ignored.

Research Methodology: This paper focuses upon consequences of labour migration in Punjab in Doaba Region and their effect on the left behind women. It is a detailed analysis to understand left-behind women's position with the help of in-depth interviews done with them. 20 semi-structured interviews were done with these women who were either staying in joint families or nuclear families. Most of the interviews were done through purposive sampling in which only those migrant's households were visited, where left behind women were staying. 10 of these interviews were done with women; whose marriage had taken place 5 to 6 years ago and second category of 10 women were those, whose marriage relationships were almost 10 or more years older. This is to understand any positional changes in family sphere that migration may bring with the passage of time after marriage and prolonged migration. 5 case studies were also done to understand the phenomenon more deeply. Participant observation technique was also followed to get in-depth results. Primary data has been collected through semi-structured interview schedules and open ended questions were asked about the standard of living of these women and their role in family matters especially in decision making process. Conversation and testimonies were used in this paper to get detailed analysis of gender roles that prevail in the family sphere. The main objective of the paper is to examine the impact of male migration on women's status and their role in the family sphere in a patriarchal system that tries to control women freedom and autonomy of decision making. The paper discusses the changing gender roles, i.e. how women have to take responsibilities for household work as well all those kinds of work which

were once done by their husbands. It discusses the dilemma in the mind of these women about their position. Comparison was done among different cases that how gender roles have gone through a change after their husbands' migration.

Punjabi Migration and Family system in Doaba Region: Doaba is basically a land between two rivers, it is a word of Persian language in which Do means two and Ab means River. Punjab is also known as a land of "Five Rivers" Punj- five and Ab-River. Doaba is having lot of fertile land area where wheat and rice cultivation is prominent.



Source: - <http://www.mapsofindia.com>

Doaba region comprises of four districts namely Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahar, Jalandhar and Kapurthala. Data was collected from the selected villages where gulf migration is prominent; basically villages of Kapurthala were taken into consideration. The destination for labour migration includes Dubai, Abu-Dhabi, and Qatar. In Kapurthala district, most of the people are vegetable cultivators and in small parts people grew wheat and rice, however vegetable and fruits cultivation is prominent in this district's villages. Large number of houses belongs to left behind families. Main occupants of these houses are left behind wives and their children or those who are staying in joint or nuclear families. The first migration started during colonial period from Majha region of Punjab and followed by districts of Malwa. During colonial period, most of the migrants worked as indentured and contracted laborers (Singh, 2003) and their favorable destinations were identified to be Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand (Jayaram, 2011). During 1870 to 1880, Sikhs got settled down in Far East, Malaya, and Hong Kong and worked as policemen. In between 1903 to 1908, Punjabis entered North America, Canada, and majority of them were

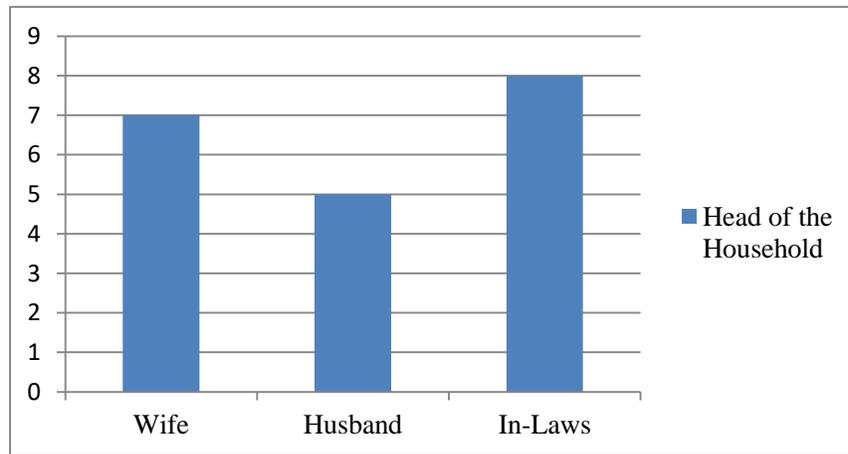
illiterate and semi-illiterate laborers from agricultural background (Desenbery & Tatla, 2009). During post-colonial period most of the migration took place from Doaba region. Most of the migration among Sikhs took place towards U.K, U.S.A and in general across the world. During this period, the migration to the gulf countries also started taking place. In the contemporary time of globalization, migration of the skilled workers has been taking place to Australia and Canada from almost the entire Punjab (Rajan & Percot, 2011). During post-colonial period it has marked a sharp increase in the international migration of Punjabis in which Jat Sikh dominated and it has been followed by Ramgrahias, Chamars and Ad-Dharmis (Taylor & Singh, 2013). But migration gained pace in 20th century, when people started migrating to developed countries. Basically, independence of India and effects of globalization increased Punjabi migration towards developed and gulf countries. No doubt migration has been taking place from whole of the Punjab but Doaba region dominates in this area. Migration of the skilled workers has been taking place to Australia and Canada from almost the entire Punjab (Rajan & Percot, 2011). Such migration is mainly dominated by male members of the family. Few evidences were found that support female migration as well; whereas, most of the literature emphasizes on male migration only and is inclined towards it. Punjabi society is based upon patrilineal decedents, and women normally remain behind the doors. With migration, many women stay behind either in joint families with their parents-in-law, brothers and sisters in-law or in nuclear families with their children. Decisions of the families are most of the time taken by elder male members or relatives that are referred to as “*Shareek*” that means paternal uncles and their descendants. So, women’s area of participation in family affairs remains confined. The participation of women in major decisions related especially to property, land purchase, household, agriculture and business in a Punjabi family is bare minimum. But the migration of male members has brought some changes in family front that can’t be ignored. No doubt such changes are still at a very small level, but presence of women in major work areas is already being felt.

Husband’s Migration and Marital Relations

With the migration of husband or male member of the household, changes have been seen at the family front. Earlier, all the responsibilities and decision were taken by the migrant husband and work of women was limited to household chores, rearing and caring of children. If an elder male member comes in front, his nature remains conservative and thought-process is still inclined towards gender stereotype, because concept of male superiority still prevails among Punjabi

society. In some cases, it is also believed that male has rational mind and can take better decisions than female. Such conservative family mindset creates problem for those women, who stay in joint families. They remain inside the four walls of the household and their liberty and mobility get restricted by others.

Figure 01: Person Heading the Family in Surveyed Migrants Households



The graph (01) gives detail of head of the household in 20 respondent's cases who were interviewed. In majority of cases, it can be seen that left behind wife is not the head of the household. In 7 cases, it was found that women were acting as head of the household but these women in most cases were from a nuclear family. It does show a positive impact of husband's migration. But even in these cases, they were handling all the matters with partial authority because they have to discuss with their husband in economic matters prior to making final decision. 5 cases were seen in which migrant husband was still acting as head of the household, especially in those cases where migration happened in early stage of marriage. All the economic matters are in the control of their husband and women are completely dependent upon their husbands. The cases where either husband or in-laws were head of the household, women autonomy and freedom were curtailed by their family members. Women during their husband's presence enjoy little liberty and after their husband's migration, other male members take control of family sphere and their situation becomes worse. The age-old traditions and norms of family don't allow woman to speak and come in front of elders. Even their migrant husband put many kinds of restriction upon them. Without telling their husbands, women can't step out of their homes. They can go outside only when they need any necessity goods. Otherwise, they remain

confined within the household which means that freedom given to women is partial in nature as their mobility is decided as per their husband's wishes. She is always symbolized with the izzat of the family. After husband's migration; even more restrictions are imposed upon her because perception of husband is that he needs to keep an eye on his wife all the time due to the physical distance between them. With various means of available communication mediums, it becomes possible for husband to keep a check on his wife's mobility by calling her on phone. It also becomes the responsibility of the woman that before going outside she has to tell him on her own. So even from a faraway place, husband imposes a kind of indirect control on woman without showing subjugation. It has become a tradition that makes it mandatory for them to seek family members' approval before they step outside.

Impact of Remittances and Gender Roles

It has been seen that the person who has control over remittances becomes an authoritative figure in the decision making process of the family. In a joint family, most of the time, remittances are in the hand of elder male member, such as father or uncle and he controls all the family affairs. In such a scenario women don't have any control on their husbands' remittances. They don't have any share in such amount that is sent by their husbands.

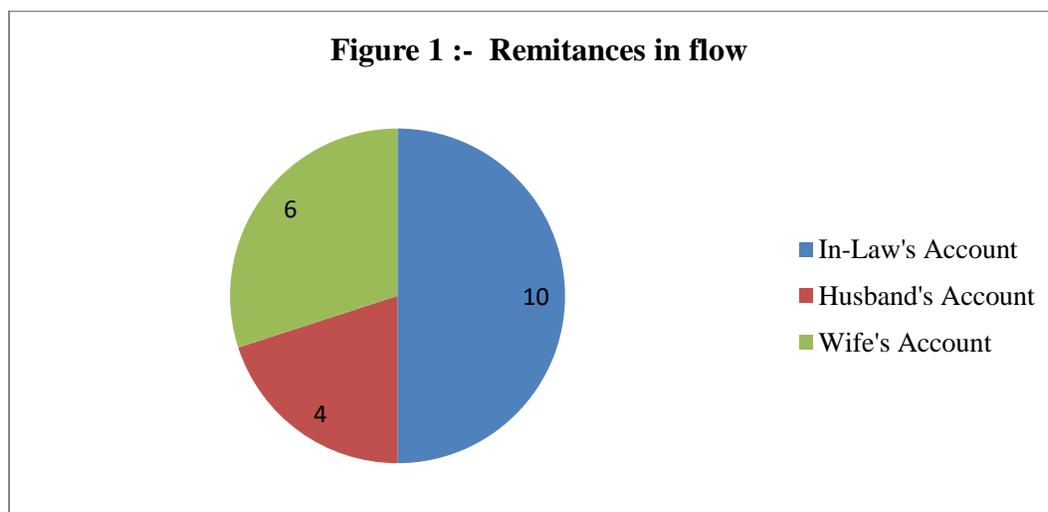


Figure (1), it can be seen that there are 6 cases where remittances also came in migrant wife's account. They don't have power to use the remittances as per their wish. Women need to discuss their budgets with their husbands before utilizing the remittances. In very few cases(3) it was observed that women had complete autonomy to utilize their remittances. These women were

respondents with marriage time span of more than 10 years. In the cases where remittances were sent to the husband's account, the flow of remittances was according to husband's wishes. It reflects a strong control on women in relation to utilization of income in family budgets. The person who has the control over remittances controls all the household affairs. In such conditions, migrants' wives survive at the mercy of their decisions. After toiling in all the household work, she does not even get any financial assistance from her in-laws. This means norms, traditions, values apply only to women and they are not for men. In nuclear families, if a woman becomes head of the household, they still feel subjugated to their husband and in-laws. They can't take their decisions independently.

Thus, Women's autonomy and freedom still need growth. She has to maintain daily record to ward-off unwanted tension and stress, so that no one puts question mark on her decision making. Little improvement indeed has been observed in cases where women have their own extended families and in such cases they exercise full freedom while taking their decisions independently. These women living in nuclear families with long marriages are handling both public and private sphere efficiently. Long years of migration of husband and staying independently for this period helped the woman in building a trust that she can take care of all the responsibilities sincerely. These women perfect the household chores and know how to handle everything. It does reflect a positive side of after-effects of migration on women who have long time span in marriage.

Changing Gender Role:

Migration of husband or male members away from home brings a lot of changes in life of those women that stay behind. Such migration creates duality in women's role that she is not only responsible for household chores but also manages husband's tasks. She can't say no to such responsibilities because she is staying in that house and societal pressure moulds her lifestyle. Whether she is ready or not, she has to follow all obligations because it is a kind of a behavior expected from her husband. It increases their workload and responsibilities beyond their imagination. No doubt women tried to maintain all the household responsibilities but such increased responsibilities create unwanted stress in their life rather it creates a dilemma in their life. They are not able to understand their actual position in the household front. Lot of question about their identity arises in their mind. Such situations increase identity crisis among the left behind women, because most of the decisions that women take are always pre-discussed with their in-laws and husband. Even when their husbands come during their vacation, they take away

all the authority and power of decision making from their wives. Later on, after their husband leave, women have to make up their mind again so as to adjust themselves in household situations. This creates confusion in women's mind related to her position in family front. So, a situational change (of husband's migration) in the family front worsens their position than improving it.

Women, who were in young age and had less time span of marriage, don't have much authority in decision making process. They were under the subjugation of their in-laws and husbands. They are maintaining their household as per their husband's wishes. No doubt, some signs of change have been recorded in their role in household tasks but it does not show them using their rational mind. Somehow changes that in actual sense reflect more freedom have been recorded in elder age women who have almost more than 10 years of marriage span, especially old age women. They become more free and independent at the family front and actually taking all the decisions with their own wishes. It is a positive change in their position but it is still not seen in all the cases. Subjugation and domination go hand in hand with their life and they don't have any control on such situations.

Conclusion

Migration brings changes to the family front, where women start taking decisions related to their family matters. Their area of work has expanded so as to engulf the new arena of decision making within its ambit. It is sort of a positive change in women's life. But this can't be seen as a permanent change in family structure; it is a situational change that is due to necessity. Due to male migration, a vacuum occurs in the family and to fill this empty space, such person is needed that can fill the gap and women perfectly fits the bill due to urgency. Urgency to fill the void makes elder male members let their patriarchy chains loose and hence, allow women participation in decision making process. But this reversal of roles is just need of the hour and elders don't want that women should remain a permanent authoritative figure. Elder male members and husband try and scrutinize women's roles to exercise dominance. This leads to identity crisis among women that whether they are domestic helpers or they have real power of decision making? No doubt remittances come into women's account but still they need to keep a record of all the money spent so as to show it to their husbands during their holiday visits. Such kind of situations makes their life more tense and stressful as they feel deprived of exclusive

rights upon remittances. Even for their own monetary needs, they have to depend upon their parents. Putting such tight control seems like a subjugation that pushes them to remain behind these unseen bars. Such situations don't let them be independent and free enough and this gives rise to various dual identities of women which creates identity crisis that is to which category they belong and who they really are? The new roles that women have to take are generally perceived by them as burden hence, should not be confused with changing gender role that empowers them. No doubt women are taking responsibilities of all public and private affairs and they are doing tasks which come under the domain of both female and male members but they are only obliging to in-law's or husband's wishes. So overall even though increased responsibilities because of male migration widens the horizon of women and enhances their personality but it does not lead to women empowerment as they are still restricted in taking actions and cannot decide for themselves or the household members as per their own wishes. No doubt in some of the situations women get freedom to deal with household issues and also try to use their rational mind where she felt that she can contribute. These changes even though small in number reflect a positive change in their life and a sign that leads toward their own freedom. In nutshell after husband's migration, women do get a space in family front where she can handle household chores but her role is still highly controlled by male members of the family. These changes do not reflect structural changes rather a positional change that has happened due to household necessities.

References:

Abadan-Unat N. (1977) Implications of migration on emancipation and pseudo-emancipation of Turkish women. *International Migration Review*, 11(1):31–51.

De Snyder V. (1993) Family life across the border: Mexican wives left behind. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 15(3):391–401

Dwiyanto A, Keban J. (1997) Migration issues in the Asia Pacific: issues paper from Indonesia. In: Brownlee P, Mitchell C, editors. *Migration Issues in the Asia Pacific*. Asia Pacific Migration Research Network; Australia: <http://www.unesco.org/most/apmrnwp8.htm>

Ellen, F & Speckmann, J.D (1990) Recruitment of Labour migrants for the Middle East: The Sri Lanka case. *International Migration Review*, 24, 297-322.

- Ennaji M, &Sadiqi F. (2004) The impact of male migration from Morocco to Europe on women: a gender approach. *Finisterra: Revista Portuguesa De Geografia*; 39(77):59–76
- Grawert E. (1992) Impacts of male outmigration on women: a case study of Kutum/Northern Darfur/Sudan. *The Ahfad Journal*, 9:37–60.
- Gordon E (1981) An analysis of the impact of labour migration on the lives of women in Lesotho. *Journal of Development Studies*; 17(3): 59-76.
- Haas &Rooij Van Aleida.(2010) Migration as Emancipation? The Impact of Internal and International Migration on the Position of Women Left Behind in Rural Morocco. *Oxford Development Studies*, 38:1, 43-62.
- Hadi, A. (2001) ‘International migration and the change of women’s position among the left behind in rural Bangladesh’, *International Journal of Population Geographyno*, vol. 7, no.1, pp. 53-61.
- Kanaiaupuni, S.M. (2000) Reframing the migration question: An analysis of men, women and gender in Mexico. *Social Forces*, 78, 1311-1347.
- Khaled L. (1995) Migration and women’s status: the Jordan case. *International Migration*, 33(2):235–250.
- Kothari U. (2003) Policy arena: migration, staying put and livelihoods. *Journal of International Development*, 15(5): 645-657.
- Lucas,R.E.B & Stark,O.(1985) Motivation to remit: evidence from Botswana, *Journal of Political Economy*, 93,pp901-918.
- Massey, D.S (1990) Social structure, household strategies and cumulative causation of migration. *Population Index*, 56, 3-26.
- Massey, D. A. (1993). Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19, 431-466.
- Massey D.S (1994) An evaluation of international migration theory. *Population and Development Review*, 20, 699-751.
- Massey D.S &Parrado , E (1994) Migradollars : The remittances and ravings of Mexican migrants to the United States. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 13, 3-30.

Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor (1993) Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19, 417–446.

Menjívar C,&Agadjanian V. (2007) Men's migration and women's lives: views from rural Armenia and Guatemala. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88(5):1243–1262.

Nguyen, L, Yeoh, S.A, Brenda & Toyota, Mika. (2007) Migration and the Well- Being of the Left Behind In Asia, *Asian Population Studies*, Vol 2:1, 37-44.

Radel C &Schmook B (2009) Migration and gender : the case of a farming ejido in Calakmul, Mexico. *inthe yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, 71: 144-163.

Rajan SI and Percot Marie (2011) *Dynamics of Indian Migration: Historical and Current Perspective*. New Delhi: Routledge.

Roy A &Nangia P (2005) Impact of male out-migration on health status of left behind wives – a study of Bihar, India. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population.

Semyonov Moshe &Gorodzeisky Anastasia (2008) Labour Migration, Remittances and Economic Well-being of Household in the Philippines. *Popul Res Policy Rev*, 27: 619-637

Stark, O (1984) Migration decision making: A review essay. *Journal of Development Economic*, 14, 251-259.

Taylor, J.E (1987) Undocumented Mexico –U.S migration and the returns to households in rural Mexico.*American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 69,619-638.

Yabik et al., (2010) Husbands' Labour Migration and Wives Autonomy: *Popul.Stud(Camb)*,64(3):293-306.

Zachariah K.C and Rajan SI. (2015). *Researching International Migration*. New Delhi: Routledge.

Zlotnik, H (1990) International migration policies and the status of female migratns. *International Migration Review*,24, 372-381.