

Shifting Gender Roles in the wake of Male-out Migration in a Village of Western Nepal

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This study delves into the effects of male out-migration on gender roles and relationships in a rural village of western Nepal. The study, carried out in two stages in 2011 to 2022, uncovers a complex relationship between remittances, the burden of work on women, and economic prospects. This study shows that while the absence of males increases the obligations of spouses, the remittance alleviate women's workload. Economic empowerment arises as a significant result, enabling women in nuclear families to own and control economic assets that are traditionally owned and controlled by the husband. The study observes a rise in female-headed households, female leadership and economic participation but acknowledges persistent gender division of labour within households. The changes brought about by male out migration also leads to migration of women to urban and semi-urban areas with both liberating and challenging experiences. This study concludes by

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JOURNAL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter), 2023
Peer Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed International Research Journal

examining potential challenges such as marital disruptions and societal disapproval.

[**Keywords** : Male out-migration, Remittance, Gender roles, Rural, Village]

1. Background

Foreign labour migration in Nepal has become an important social and demographic phenomenon affecting households, economy and society. Though the history of migration dates back to 18th century, the volume of foreign labour migration and flow of remittance have steadily increased since the late 1990s (IOM 2019; Sharma et al., 2014; Adhikari, 2021). The number of households receiving remittances has significantly increased from 23.4% in 1995/96 to 55.8% in 2010/11 (CBS, 2012; IOM, 2019). The monetary value of remittances per home receiver has experienced a substantial increase, rising from Rs 15,160 in 1995/96 to Rs 204,782 in 2016, representing an almost 14-fold growth. The proportion of remittances in household income increased significantly from 26.6% in 1995/96 to 62% in 2016 (CBS, 2012). In the 2018/19 fiscal year, Nepal received a significant influx of remittances, totaling \$8.3 billion, which accounted for about 30% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (World Bank, 2019).

The volume of foreign migration has constantly been growing. According to the 2021 Census, there are more than 2.1 million Nepali persons living in foreign countries, which makes up 7.4% of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 2022). Furthermore, a substantial proportion of Nepali students choose to pursue study abroad, as indicated by the Ministry of study, Science and Technology (MoEST) issuing 'no objection certifications' to 416,364 persons from 2008/09 to 2020/21. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the number of Nepalese who are actively seeking career opportunities abroad, despite the long-standing tradition of migration. From 2008/09 onwards, the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) has granted more over 4.7 million labour licenses for new entries and has renewed over 1.8 million labour permissions since 2011/12 (Sijapati et al., 2017).

Previous research predominantly examines migration patterns, factors, and the impact of remittances (Acharya and Leon-Gonzalez (2012); Adhikari and Hobley (2015); Gurung, 1983; Kollmair et al., 2006; Sharma & Gurung, 2009), although the gender-specific effects

of migration have received limited attention. According to Van Rooij (2000), and Sadiqi and Ennaji (2004), the migration of males has a significant impact on gender relations leading to a notable change in household work arrangements. The prevalence of male-breadwinner and female homemaker ideology is influenced by the dominance of adult male migrants, as evidenced by the demographic features of Nepali migrants. The cultural constraints on women's movement have influenced the demographic makeup, resulting in a higher number of females compared to males in the census statistics (CBS, 2012). Studies indicate that male migration might result in both advantageous and disadvantageous consequences for gender roles. Positively, it has been linked to the reduction of customs such as the dowry system in Bangladesh (Hadi, 2001) and the advancement of gender equality in India (Fleury, 2016). Nevertheless, research conducted in Ghana (De la Garza, 2010; van der Zee, 2012) presents a different depiction, revealing elevated workloads, cross-gender role expectations, and heightened physical and emotional difficulties experienced by women who are left behind.

The impacts of foreign labour migration and remittance on gender are multifaceted. The research carried out by Shrestha and Conway (2001) highlight the diverse impacts of migration on women who remain in their home countries. Foreign labour migration is seen by some as a way to reduce the burden on women, increase their access to income and economic resources, and ultimately result in the hiring of more labour (Van Rooij, 2000). In contrast, other studies carried out in India by Paris, Singh, and Luis (2005), and Desai and Banerji (2008) reveal that the workload could rise, especially in rice-producing regions, when remittances are inadequate in hiring labour to work in the field. In context of Nepal, Paneru (2006) and Kasper (2005) offer contradictory results. Paneru posits that the workload experiences an early surge but subsequently diminishes after remittances commence, whereas Kasper contends that male migration engenders an augmented workload for women who remain. Karki (1998) adds complexity to the story by highlighting an escalation in the responsibilities and authority of women in homes in the Syangja district of Nepal. Moreover, the amount of money earned through remittances seems to have a significant impact on the social status and position of women. According to Maharjan et al. (2012), receiving higher remittances tends to reduce the amount of work and increase the ability to make decisions.

Although there is an increasing amount of research on migration in Nepal, there is a significant lack of information regarding the effects of male out-migration on gender roles and relationship. There is a dearth of studies that takes into account the wider socio-cultural environment, which includes norms, values, and family structures while analyzing the gender implications of male migration. A more nuanced and context-specific approach is needed to fully understand the relationship between male out-migration and its impact on gender roles. In this particular context, this study examines the impacts of male out-migration on women living in a village located in the Baglung district of the western hill of Nepal. Through the analysis of primary data gathered during fieldwork carried out in 2022 and 2021, the objective of this study is to elucidate the intricate dynamics pertaining to the changing responsibilities, workload, and social status of women in households when male heads are working abroad.

2. Study Area and Research Methods

This study is based on fieldwork carried out in Narethanti village, situated in a village of the western hill of Nepal, during the years 2011 and 2022. The village, situated around 72 kilometers away from the district headquarters of Baglung, has undergone significant changes. The main source of sustenance for the community is the money received from those working abroad. In the past, Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Malaysia were the primary choices for migration. In recent years, there has been an expansion of destination countries, with the emergence of new locations such as Japan, Korea, Australia, Portugal, and several European countries. The diverse effects of labour migration and remittance have become firmly embedded in this village, shaping both the means of subsistence and social dynamics. The village acts as a concrete manifestation of the complex interaction between migration, remittance, and the consequent social transformations.

The research technique used in this study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the changes taking place in a rural village, with a particular focus on gender roles, relations, and workload and social status of women. The methodologies employed were meticulously designed to represent the complex interaction between economic activities, migration trends, and subsequent changes in gender roles and relations.

The main approach for gathering data entailed conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with a diverse sample of 20 participants. This sample included both males and females from homes involved in migration. More precisely, a total of 15 in-depth interviews were carried out with women who lived in households when male members go abroad for work, while 5 interviews were carried out with male migrants who had come back to the village. The participants were selected by using purposive and convenience sample methods, guaranteeing inclusion of diverse perspectives. The interviews, which ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in duration, provided an opportunity to thoroughly examine preset questions and engage in spontaneous discussions.

Comprehensive field notes were diligently kept following each interview, so expanding the depth of the information. During the course of fieldwork, the researcher carefully observed and recorded various activities taking place in residential households, agricultural activities, and community gatherings. The observations were recorded in a field notebook either during or immediately after the observation period, adding a qualitative dimension to the study.

The ethical considerations of this research were of utmost importance and were carefully upheld throughout the entire process. Stringent steps were enacted to guarantee the confidentiality of participants, and explicit consent was sought from each individual involved. The researchers placed a high priority on ensuring the participants' well-being and comfort throughout both the interview and observation stages, which helped to create a study atmosphere that was characterized by trust and respect.

3. Key Findings and Discussion

The study's findings show that the occurrence of male out migration has complex implications for gender relationships. The emigration of males inevitably exacerbates the load on women, since they are required to assume the obligations that were previously fulfilled by male individuals. Male out migration has the capacity to mitigate workloads by means of remittances; yet, it encounters difficulties stemming from temporal factors and the cyclical patterns of crop labour availability. The lack of a male presence within the household places an additional responsibility on the wife.

The rise in women's access to economic resources in rural communities can be attributed to the combination of an increasing workload and the occurrence of male out-migration. The phenomenon of migration has had a significant impact on the empowerment of women, as it has provided them with the opportunity to assume family economic obligations that were traditionally given to their spouses. Migrant spouses, in addition to acquiring limited ownership of land resources, accumulate various financial assets, such as debtors or bank accounts, by utilizing remittances obtained from their migrant spouses. Migrant women have assumed significant roles in household affairs and have been instrumental in addressing community-level concerns, owing to the expanding range of labour responsibilities and the attainment of economic autonomy.

The lack of male presence has led to a notable increase in women's involvement and influence in home leadership, economic administration, and representation in communal assemblies. The distribution of workload, economic resources, and political influence within family dynamics exhibits variations that are contingent upon characteristics such as family structure, the quantity and age of offspring, and the extent and caliber of land resources. However, the acquisition of control over economic resources and greater involvement in decision-making processes have played a crucial role in facilitating the empowerment of women and triggering significant transformations in gender dynamics within society.

The practice of foreign Male out migration has become a widely adopted strategy in Narethanti as a means to expand household economies beyond the agricultural sector. Notwithstanding this, the prevailing gendered division of labour in the local society ensures that males are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon. Conventionally, males are entrusted with economic management and public decision-making responsibilities, whereas women are relegated to domestic labour and household upkeep. As a result, males frequently undertake international ventures to supervise economic resources, leaving females in charge of childcare, geriatric care, domestic duties, livestock, and agriculture.

Out of the 65 migrant workers surveyed, a mere 10.77 percent (7 females) have opted for international migration. In contrast, the majority of 89.3 percent (58 males) have departed from the village in search of manual labour. Significantly, approximately 47.93 percent

of the male population is employed in foreign labour. The impact of male emigration on women's workloads is minimized by the conventional notion that housekeeping is predominantly the domain of women. Nevertheless, migration has a noticeable impact on the workload of women engaged in farming, given that gender-specific agricultural duties were previously divided equally between the sexes prior to this trend.

The considerable shift in farming responsibilities towards women has been caused by the migration of males, as indicated by the fact that 51.16 percent (66) of females are engaged in farming. Moreover, the exit of male migrants has had an impact on the ability of women to participate in decision-making processes that have historically been associated with men, such as those at the domestic and community levels.

3.1 Changes in Gendered Division of Labour

The foreign labour migration has effected to gendered division of labour in a society. The consequences of out-migration's selective character are evident in the village women's workload experiencing fluctuations between increases and decreases. As a result of the migration of partners, women assume additional responsibilities that were previously handled by their spouses. However, migrant remittances provide a certain degree of alleviation through their support in organizing wage labour or functioning as alternative sources of income for women engaged in village employment.

However, the involvement of migrant spouses in their wives' agricultural endeavours has ceased, requiring women to either employ wage labour or perform these responsibilities manually. Although remittances can be employed for labour expenses, locating workers during optimal seasons and times presents a significant obstacle, consequently exacerbating the burden on women. As per observations, in order to bridge the labour divide, women employ reciprocal labour exchange; however, this practice concurrently increases their workload. The scarcity of labour in the village is emphasized in Gita Kunwar's statement, which further demonstrates how the absence of males forces women to assume additional responsibilities and manage increased duties :

Prior to his departure, he did all the works. Previously, I only did housework. He helped me with everything. Unfortunately, he can't help me anymore. During his absence, I have to do a lot

of work. I have to do all the work that my husband used to do before we moved, in addition to regular housework. There are no men willing to work on other people's land, but my husband keeps suggesting that I hire paid labour with remittances. Due to the lack of ploughmen with horses, planting at the right time and in the right season is especially hard.

This has resulted in an increased burden for female members of society, as demonstrated by the quotation above. Various factors, including the scale of agricultural farms and the labour force availability within households, were identified in interviews as influencing the impact of male out-migration. As an illustration, participants who owned substantial agricultural land reported experiencing augmented labour demands during their husbands' absences. Participants belonging to households that owned a comparatively modest quantity of land reported experiencing minimal to no labour-related obligations. In the interim, participants belonging to nuclear families with young children recounted their prioritization of household duties. The participants who belonged to extended family, conversely, did not have to share the workload, as their relatives assisted with housekeeping and farm tasks while their spouses were at sea. As an illustration, consider the following statement by Suntali Rana: "I have work all the day. I have to do everything in the house and on the farm. I have to clean, take care of the sick, teach, feed the animals, clean their stalls, carry feed and wood, dig fields and level the land."

In contrast to what was said above, Bisnu Khatri told that :

In our home, there is no difference between the work that was done before and after our men moved away. The father-in-law takes care of the animals and farm work. Our three daughters-in-law clean the house and do the dishes and laundry. Our mother-in-law cooks the food. In addition to cleaning the house and mowing the grass, we do all the tasks that only women do on the farm, either by engaging in reciprocal labour relation or doing them ourselves. During field harvesting and planting, we hire ploughmen and other men to do work that needs to be done by hand.

Even in a nuclear family, if the daughters are young, they help their moms with housework and farming, which makes life easier for the women. In the same way, if the kids are older, they make up for

the father not being in the family. The following narrative of a 40 years old female respondent illustrate how the young daughter help their mother in household chores :

When my kids were little, I had to do everything around the house and in the garden by myself. The oldest daughter is now married, and the youngest helps me cook, clean, and wash dishes now that they are older. It's harvest and growing time for crops, and she offers her help with farm-related tasks. Our sons don't help us with housework, but they do most of the work on the farm when they're not in school. The main jobs they do are things like plow and dig the field, level the wall, and cut down the trees for the fire.

Based on the accounts provided by the respondents, it was observed that home-leave served as a viable strategy to circumvent the need for engaging in paid labour, hence alleviating the burden of women's domestic responsibilities. The majority of individuals indicated that they contact their wives to request home-leaves. During the majority of the labour incentive period. This phenomenon can be attributed to the support provided by migrant husbands, who contribute to agricultural activities by engaging in tasks such as ploughing, leveling the field, and overseeing the overall management of farming operations. Migrant spouses additionally contribute to their families by engaging in chores that are traditionally associated with masculinity, such as cutting and transporting fuel wood, as well as constructing various structures like verandas, toilets, and cottages. However, the respondents express mixed feelings regarding their husbands' involvement throughout their home-leave period. While a subset of respondents said that their spouses assumed all responsibility for household tasks, another group indicated that their husbands contributed little or no effort in this regard. While the majority of women expressed appreciation for their husbands' contributions, a subset of women, conversely, indicated that their husbands utilized their leaves without engaging in any substantial tasks. As an illustration, a woman belonging to the Rana Magar community conveyed that, instead of engaging in productive activities, her spouse indulges in alcohol consumption, card games, and aimless wandering within the hamlet and town during the entirety of the break. In contradistinction to the aforementioned assertion, a woman belonging to the Bhandari community expressed that :

I count down the days until my husband's leave because being with him makes me forget about work. When he comes, he helps me do things that men do, like wash my clothes, clean the house, and sometimes cook food. He cares more about the kids of kids and helps them get ready for school. He makes it clear that he is ready to do everything with me.

The reduction in women's workload during the home-leaves of migrant labourers is primarily attributed to the absence of male members in the family and the prevailing societal beliefs. In such cases, migrant wives without male family members are compelled to hire wage labourers to fulfill tasks that are traditionally assigned to men, but are exclusively restricted to be performed by women. One example involves a Khattri lady who expressed that in the absence of her husband, she is compelled to contact individuals to engage in tasks such as land cultivation and the execution of religious and ritualistic rites. Nevertheless, due to the absence of their husbands throughout each harvesting and planting season, women are compelled to employ labourers to carry out ploughing activities, as the prevailing societal structure prohibits women from engaging in such tasks. Consequently, women are compelled to engage in the employment of wage labour under any circumstances. In this regard, a female member of the Rana community expressed that the absence of women engaging in agricultural ploughing within the village can be attributed to the influence of traditional beliefs which discourage women from participating in this activity. In instances where households lack a male member, it is necessary for them to engage the services of a ploughman to carry out the task of ploughing the farm. Expressing her frustration, she stated, "Given the opportunity, I would prefer to take action myself instead of constantly relying on others and inconveniencing myself by constantly moving around and making numerous requests."

The phenomenon of Male out migration has led to a decrease in agricultural land ownership among households in rural areas, due to the remittance inflow and the resulting shortage of a productive population. This phenomenon led to a decrease in the dependence on agricultural production and an increase in the reliance on commodities inside the market. In addition to these developments, it has facilitated the opportunity for women to relocate from rural areas to urban or market settings.

In other terms, the reduction of dependence on agricultural operations for sustenance and the shift towards non-agricultural sectors have played a significant role in transforming gender dynamics within the community. This phenomenon can be attributed to the perception held by women that metropolitan settlements offer a means of liberation from the societal constraints imposed upon them in rural areas. The provision of remittances has played a significant role in supporting the livelihoods of individuals, leading to a notable inclination among women to offer their land as collateral for loans or as a gift, thereafter relocating to urban areas. For urban-dwelling, educated women, relocating to the city serves as a means to somewhat alleviate the burdens of restrictive patriarchal dynamics and the heavy workload prevalent in rural areas. This migration is often motivated by the desire to provide better educational opportunities for their children, among other objectives. Nevertheless, the shift towards a more market-oriented economy and the corresponding decline in reliance on traditional farming practices may not inherently represent a process of liberation. However, it is evident that the practice of redistributing land to others has indeed alleviated the burden on women's labour and circumvented the need for costly wage labour in that context.

The interviews revealed contrasting experiences between the wives of migrant workers residing in rural and urban areas. The women residing in the rural reported a sense of being subjected to familial authority, whereas the women residing in the city conveyed experiencing a greater degree of freedom from such constraints. Conversely, several other interviewees expressed the viewpoint that the relocation to metropolitan areas or market centers did not effectively enhance women's agency in terms of decision-making and self-sustaining livelihoods. According to their perspective, rather than empowering women, urban environments tend to foster a greater reliance on males due to women's limited financial independence. In this regard, a Bhandari woman expressed that metropolitan women who rely on monthly remittances often find themselves compelled to engage in various demeaning behaviors in order to continue their livelihoods.

Furthermore, the decision to relocate to urban regions, with or without family, results in alterations in gender dynamics within those environments. According to the statements made by interviewees, it has been suggested that the liberation from patriarchal dynamics

may potentially lead to the dissolution of the marital bond between spouses. This phenomenon can be attributed to the perspective articulated by Jabbar Bahadur KC, wherein the older generation tends to disapprove of the idea of a daughter-in-law residing without a husband. This perspective is rooted in the belief that such a situation signifies a decline in moral values and an inclination towards promiscuity, ultimately leading to the deterioration of the sacred bond between a husband and wife. As per the account of a Bhandari woman who has remarried, it is deemed unacceptable for individuals of both genders to endure extended periods of separation, as this may potentially lead to divorce or subsequent marriages in that context. The following narrative of a respondent at the age of 30 show how the male out-migration has leading to the breakdown in marital and family relation :

I couldn't give up my dream of going to school. Because of this, I went to Baglung to keep studying while my husband worked in Malaysia. When I first asked him to, he agreed and sent me money. But later, when his in-laws made him mad, he cut off all touch with me. I knew where he was and waited for a year without seeing him. But he didn't send any money back nor went back to their home during these days. It caused a lot of trouble in my life. Then I could take it no longer and decided to get married again.

3.2 Women's Access to Economic Assets

Most importantly, men leaving their homes to work elsewhere has made it easier for women to run the household economy by taking over the role of husband at the household level. According to the people who were interviewed, the economic assets gained by migrant workers have been owned by women in nuclear families. The women who were interviewed said that they had been in charge of migrant families' homes even though patriarchal laws and norms made it hard for women to control land and money. They said that the old system of land ownership couldn't encourage women to claim land rights. Instead, it let men keep tight control of land even when they weren't at home. When people first started coming back from abroad, most of the land they bought was registered to their husbands. Their husbands also owned their debtors and moneylenders. But because of the land tenure law, people have started to register land on women. As a result, land bought with money sent home has slowly been registered from men to women. On the other hand, the method for

giving credit or extensions to men has been weak, and women have had more access to the money that was sent. This has helped to give women more power in society.

The woman in the village makes decisions about how to use the land now that the husband is away. It is now more about what women want than what men want when it comes to whether land is used for farming or not and whether it is given on loan or for free. Similarly, the cash earnings have been given to women because of the opening of banking channels and the fact that the husbands are often not in the village. A female respondent shared that:

I now have money in the bank. My husband used to send me money through a money transfer, and I had to go to Baglung or Hatiya to get it. But now he sends money straight to my personal account. Since I need it often, I take it out for daily spending without asking him. Besides the daily costs, I ask my husband to take it out. If a friend asks for money, I talk to him about it and make a decision.

Prior to migration, the male head of the household held final decision-making authority over matters pertaining to household finances and other affairs. However, this particular skill or ability possesses the transfer of assets was made to his spouse subsequent to his departure for employment in another region. In contrast, it is seen that the male individual acquires income from an outside nation, whereas the female individual assumes ownership of those funds within the local community. Both individuals engage in the process of determining the manner and location in which to employ it. In essence, both men and women actively participate in the decision-making process pertaining to the maintenance, management, and financial aspects of the family economy. During the process of migrating, individuals engage in consultation with one another through the use of telephone communication, ultimately arriving at a choice that is deemed suitable and appropriate.

In the context of spouses working overseas, it is observed that wives possess the ability to independently exercise decision-making authority pertaining to routine household maintenance and daily expenses. In alternative terms, the absence of males leads to a heightened sense of autonomy and reliance on males. While these women rely on their husbands for financial support, they possess autonomy in making decisions regarding the allocation of funds to

meet their daily requirements. Nevertheless, women are required to seek the consent of their spouses. According to the interviewed female participant, all genders exhibit equal involvement in making purchasing decisions and managing their financial resources. In addition to the transmission of funds, husbands correspond with their wives to provide guidance regarding the appropriate allocation of finances and the intended purposes for which these funds are to be utilized. As an illustrative instance, Juna Khatri recounted her personal experience as follows :

Before he left, he would decide how much the family would spend and how much they would make. I'm in charge of everything now that he's out of the country. Since he works and sends money regularly, it's been easy to keep the house running. He tells me all the time, "Don't invite hardship to maintain your household; instead, use remittance to handle it." I am now acting in the right way. I talk to him even though I need a lot of money. I will have to explain everything to my husband if I spend money without asking first.

In contrast to women belonging to nuclear families, the women interviewed who were part of extended families claimed that the economic status of their families has not been boosted by the out-migration of men, as their fathers-in-law receive income from overseas. As per their account, their fathers-in-law predominantly receive the majority of the funds, while they themselves receive an allocation of money for basic expenses, sometimes referred to as pocket money. According to their statements, it was also mentioned that the fathers-in-law typically assume responsibility for financial management. Occasionally, individuals seek guidance from their migrant male offspring residing in a foreign nation, while neglecting to engage in consultation with their daughters-in-law residing in the same family.

3-3 Women's Participation in the Decision-Making Process

In tandem with the heightened workload and enhanced economic agency, there has been a notable rise in women's involvement in decision-making processes pertaining to both communal affairs and household matters. The involvement and status of women in household leadership, economic administration, and representation in communal gatherings have witnessed notable growth.

According to the respondents, in situations where males are absent, the majority of women assume the de facto role of household heads in migrant households, although their husbands continue to occupy the nominal position of household heads. According to their perspective, women are no longer confined to the role of a housewife, but rather have emerged as active decision-makers. As individuals assume responsibility for managing household affairs and making daily decisions, they effectively assume the role of de facto household head within nuclear family structures. According to the women interviewed, in the absence of their husbands, they assume the management of household affairs, including decision-making and assuming full responsibility. However, they were unprepared to assume the role of the leader of the household. Inquiring about the identities of family heads, it was customary for women to designate their husbands as the primary household heads.

The women in question assume responsibility for making decisions solely pertaining to daily operations, while deferring matters of greater scope and significance until their husbands return from overseas. Strategic decisions are made within the context of home-leaves. However, in cases where prompt action is required, they engage in consultation with their spouses by initiating a telephone conversation in order to arrive at a suitable resolution. For example, when women are faced with decisions such as obtaining a significant credit, purchasing land, constructing a house, or contributing funds towards social and developmental initiatives. Nevertheless, women hold a significant position in the decision-making process pertaining to the how, where, and when of various activities inside the village. In the realm of strategic affairs, women often possess a higher level of familiarity and acclimation in other countries compared to their husbands. The role of the wife in the village entails serving as the primary conduit of information for her husband, relaying topics pertaining to both the home and the broader community. Typically, following the identification of a problem, plan, or event, a woman engages in a collaborative process with her husband, seeking his counsel or agreement, ultimately leading to the attainment of a suitable resolution. In this regard, it is pertinent to use the words of Gita Kunwar as an illustrative example.

For the past two years, we have kept our family away from our parents. The kids are very little. No one else is available to help me with something around the house. It's hard, but I have to

make almost all of my daily decisions by myself. Today that we have cell phone service, it's been easy to talk to the husband. If I run into a problem while making a choice by myself, I can talk to my father and my in-laws. But most of the time, I call my husband because it's easy to do so. He tells me what to do and how to do it while I call him. Then I make a choice based on that.

The involvement of male members in the households and community gatherings continues even when their husbands are on leave and present at home. As per their assertions, the male migrants who return do not neglect their wives upon retirement or during periods of absence from home. Due to her extensive knowledge and familiarity with both domestic and communal matters, she actively assists her husband in managing household responsibilities, agricultural endeavours, and community engagements. However, individuals may have difficulties when making decisions without engaging in sufficient dialogue with one another. The argument is represented by the statement made by Paul Khatri. The individual revealed :

We often talk things over with each other and come to a good choice. She also gives me good advice that helps me make the right choice at the right time. But as the head of the family, I have to make quick decisions without her input sometimes. If the choice hurts anyone, she starts crying with me, and we fight for a while. As the head of the family, I expect her to talk to me before she makes a choice. She tries to get around me sometimes and make decisions on her own. Because of this, we fight because we don't know who is in charge of the home.

The data clearly indicates that the emigration of males has led to an increase in the involvement of women in nuclear families. However, women from extended families have reported a decline in their participation in the decision-making process within the home. According to a Shrish woman's perspective, the diminished level of participation might be attributed to the influence exerted by parents-in-law, who frequently assume decision-making authority inside the household. Prior to migration, husbands played a crucial role in mediating between their wives and parents, ensuring that the decisions made by the parents aligned with the interests of the women. However, with the absence of their husbands, the representation of their interests has diminished. In the context of

familial dynamics, a Brahmin woman expressed her perspective by stating that daughters-in-law, because to their obligation to show respect towards their parents-in-law, are unable to openly voice their personal interests. However, she observed that the parents-in-law often disregard or overlook these interests. The inability of a recently married daughter-in-law to effectively communicate her desires with her parents-in-law has been observed. The woman expressed her role within the extended household, stating that she occasionally receives information about household matters either through phone communication with her husband or upon his return from abroad.

In the context of community-level meetings, it is customary for each household to be represented by at least one family member. In this regard, within the context of an extended household, it is typically the father-in-law who assumes the role of representing the household during community meetings. Within the context of the nuclear family structure, it is typically the woman who assumes the responsibility of representing her household during various meetings. The individuals who were interviewed provided their perspectives similar to the aforementioned statement, the Rana woman expressed, "In the past, my spouse would participate in gatherings held within our community." Since he is located outside of the community, I am consistently attending all of them.

Initially, the wives of migrants assume the role of their husbands, so assuming their status within society. However, over time, these women establish their own position and develop their own unique identities within the societal framework. According to the account provided by the Rana lady, individuals were referred to not by their actual names, but rather by their marital status in relation to their husbands, such as "wife of Yame" or "wife of Shame." However, subsequently, women began to be referred to by their own names rather than their spouses' names. Furthermore, the spouses of accomplished migrant individuals are afforded precedence in the decision-making process due to their ability to contribute to social and developmental initiatives through the remittances acquired from overseas employment. Initially, a significant challenge arose for the majority of women in comprehending talks, primarily attributable to their limited educational background and lack of exposure to community meetings, resulting in a dearth of practical expertise in this domain. Similarly, due to a significant under-representation of women, they often experienced feelings of timidity and chose to

remain reticent during meetings predominantly attended by male participants. However, at present, they are no longer a minority and do not experience inhibitions that would prevent them from actively participating in community gatherings. Community meetings serve as a platform for female too to openly express their opinions, ideas, and disagreements. A female respondent shared that :

I have never been to a neighbourhood meeting before and I have never been to school. Some people made me feel bad when I went to community meetings. I used to be fair, and now I have to pay a fine. When I went to meetings with my in-laws, I used to go, listen, and then come back. But now I'm too shy to speak up. Over time, it became a habit for me. At the same time, it's easier to speak out now that there are more women around. I can now easily say what I want to say if I want to.

In the nuclear family, male members' absence has led to an increased involvement and responsibility of women in community meetings. However, due to time constraints, they have encountered difficulties in effectively managing their time for community affairs. Moreover, in line with the growing involvement and influence in community and family decision-making processes, the migratory experience has played a significant role in shaping women's presence and engagement in both community and household matters, even upon the husbands' return from overseas.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This study examines the influence of male out migration on gender role and relationship. The study, conducted through two stages of field research in Narethanti village, Western Nepal in 2011 and 2022, reveals that while the absence of male intensify the workload and responsibilities of spouse, remittances sent back by male help to reduce the burden on women's workload. Male out-migration provides women with opportunities to engage in traditional male occupations; however, gendered work division persists, affecting both the male and female. The research highlights the rise in female leadership and economic participation, while also noting an increase in agricultural responsibilities. Temporary home-leaves provide respite from women's responsibilities, which are affected by societal norms. The migration of males leads to a decline in agricultural land ownership, which in turn leads to increased dependence on markets and encourages the migration of

females to urban areas. This simultaneous encounter offers both freedom and difficulties. The study concludes by examining the possibility of marriage breakup resulting from urban migration and societal disapproval of prolonged separations.

The phenomenon of male out-migration has a profound impact on the economic empowerment of women. Women in nuclear families have gained authority over economic assets that belong to migrant workers, who have chosen to register these assets under their wives' names, despite the prevailing patriarchal standards. Women are granted the authority to make decisions regarding land utilization, agriculture, financial loans, and day-to-day expenditures. Enabling the establishment of banking channels allows for the direct transfer of funds to women's individual accounts, so augmenting their financial independence. Despite ongoing conversation with spouses, women play an active role in decision-making processes concerning home economics, demonstrating a more equitable level of involvement. Within extended family structures, fathers-in-law assume the responsibility of overseeing financial resources, hence restricting the financial independence of daughters-in-law. The research findings indicate that the relocation of males from the village has had a significant impact on altering gender dynamics and enhancing the empowerment of women.

The study highlights a notable increase in women's involvement in decision-making processes at the community and household levels as a result of men migrating away. Within migrant households, women play an active role in assuming de facto leadership positions, even while their husbands occupy the formal head posts. They take charge of everyday operations and postpone important decisions until their husbands return. Women exhibit an increased level of independence, participating in cooperative decision-making during periods of absence from home. Women's participation in community activities is widespread, particularly in nuclear families where they often represent their houses. The absence of husbands results in a change in women's social standing, originally indicated by the use of their husbands' names but gradually acknowledged by their own distinctive names. Women surmount early obstacles to actively engage and express their viewpoints, exhibiting heightened participation in nuclear families but experiencing a decrease in involvement in extended families as a

result of parental authority. In general, the departure of males from a community has given women the ability to actively participate in community matters and decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the study highlights the effects of male out-migration on gender relationship and females' participation in economic activities and decision-making processes in both the households and community level. The change is clearly observed in the empowerment of women in nuclear households, where they exercise authority over economic resources and actively engage in financial decision-making processes. This change challenges conventional gender stereotypes, demonstrating a more equitable participation of both genders in domestic matters. The extended families follow a distinct path, which has a minimal effect on women's economic independence. However, the overall results emphasize a substantial increase in women's involvement in community and domestic matters as a result of the lack of males. Women successfully adjust to these evolving dynamics, thereby influencing a transformed social perception of their responsibilities. Nevertheless, the study also highlights concerns regarding potential difficulties, such as the breakdown of marriage relationships and criticism from society. This underscores the importance of carefully considering policies to accommodate the changing gender dynamics resulting from the influx of foreign workers.

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