

**Asian University for Women**

**The Feminization of Labor Migration and its  
impact on Gender relations and Transnational  
Families in Nepal**

**Senior Thesis in Asian Studies**

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## Abstract

Since 1990s, the participation of independent Nepali female migrants in the global labor market has transformed the traditional migration trends in Nepal. From 2002 to 2007, the government of Nepal promoted female labor migration to alleviate poverty in the country. Subsequently, the participation of independent Nepali women in international labor migration became popular. The Middle Eastern countries (Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon, Israel, etc.) and South-East Asian countries such as Malaysia remain the top destination for Nepali female labor migrants. Many Nepali women seek opportunities in domestic labor abroad such as domestic workers, housekeepers, and caretakers. The increasing trend of independent female labor migrants seeking employment abroad follows the global trend of “Feminization of Labor Migration”. The feminization of labor migration is a discursive subject that deals with political and social structures of a society, such as legal policies and hierarchical social values that perpetuate gender inequality in both working countries and the global labor market. It is necessary to focus on the role of gender in migration discourse in order to address the difference in experience of women to that of men before, during and after the process of migration. This Senior Thesis acknowledges migration in terms of gender perspective to explore the impact of women’s migration in reconstructing the hegemonic structure in their societies and in transforming the gender roles of women in their families. This qualitative research is based on three methods: in-depth individual interviews, focus group, and discourse analysis. This paper addresses Nepali migrant women’s agency in participating in feminization of labor migration and their roles in reconstructing the gender relations within their families and lives of those who are left behind after migration.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background:

Transnational migration is a common phenomenon that has been assisted and perpetuated by globalization. The advancement of development and technology due to globalization heightens the expectations of people for better lives. As a result, people migrate to other countries or places for better employment opportunities, quality education, and raising their standard of living (Quesada and Ghimire, 2013:3). There are different forms of migration. For instance, some people migrate to developed countries for education and skilled employment opportunities, while some people migrate to developing or developed countries for manual jobs (Quesada and Ghimire, 2013:3). Likewise, there are cases of refugees who migrate to other countries or places due to conflicts and wars in their countries of origin. Labor migration has become an important political and socioeconomic issue recently (Gurung and Khatiwada, 2013:1). According to UNESCO (2008), international labor migration is defined as the movement of people across borders for the main purpose of employment or work (Gurung and Khatiwada, 2013:1). The expanding economies and heightening living standard of people in the developed countries create employment opportunities for low wage labor from developing countries (Sassen in Parrenas, 2000:564). Millions of people from developing nations like Nepal migrate to the developed countries as laborers in order to improve the lives of their families.

Labor migration from Nepal has been seen as an alternative to the increasing unemployment problem in the country. Nepal has been claimed as the largest exporter of labor per capita comparing to the other Asian countries (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:18). The number of Nepali migrating for employment opportunities has been rising rapidly since two decades. According to the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), the number of Nepali who obtained labor permits have increased from 3,605 in 1993/94 to 453,543 in 2012/13 (Sharma, Pandey, Pathak, and Sijapati-Basnet, 2014:46). The numbers suggest that the labor permits have increased by four hundred and fifty thousand compared to that of the beginning. Labor migration in Nepal contributes to the economy of the country as the remittances constitute more than 25 percent of the total GDP (*ibid* 18). Millions of labor migrants engage in low-wage industries in the countries of

destination such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing, domestic work, and care giving (*ibid* 23). Over the past three decades, the Gulf nations (primarily Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Lebanon) and South East Asia (primarily Malaysia) have been the most significant destinations for the Nepali labor migrants (*ibid* 32). In the context of Nepal, migration to India was the most common labor migration phenomenon before. However, Nepali migrants' huge participation in the global economy has changed the historical trends of transnational migration today. Likewise, the participation of female migrants in international labor migration has challenged the historical migration trends in Nepal. The migration of women in Nepal is a recent phenomenon; however, it follows the trend of "feminization of migration" in global nexus. 'Feminization of migration' is defined as the rising number of women migrating independently in the gender segregated labor markets (Piper, 2005: 5). The changing global labor markets have opened opportunities for women, increasing the volume of female migrants from the developing countries like Nepal. These contemporary changes in the global labor market have led migration scholars towards gendered analyses of migration (Piper, 2005: 1). The evident changes in the trend of migration in terms of gender has diversified migration patterns, legal structures, working conditions, division of labor, and vulnerabilities that female migrants experience.

On the other hand, feminized or gendered analyses of labor migration highlights new opportunities for women to improve their lives, reconfigure traditional gender relations and power structures within the societies, and support transnational families. This study discusses the causes, processes, and impact of feminized labor migration in the context of Nepal. The migration of women workers suggests new scope for women's agency (Jones, 2008: 761). For instance, many Nepali female migrants have challenged the traditional gender relations within their families by leading the role as migrants and supporting their families. Thus, the discussion in this thesis is based on the experiences of former migrants who contributed in this study. The experiences of the participants as labor migrants helped to understand the recent trend of feminization of migration in Nepal as well as the impact of migration in challenging social structures of Nepali patriarchal society that had positioned them in lower status within their families. However, the discussion of feminized or gendered migration will be incomplete without the acknowledgement of the female migrants' struggles in their journey of migration both in the countries of origin and destination. Thus, this qualitative research also covers the struggles that the former Nepali female migrants experienced during their process of migration and their lives as migrants in the countries of destination.

## 1.2. Research Topic

In this research, I focus on labor migration trend among Nepali women. In case of Nepal, transnational labor migration was previously male dominated and thus, Nepali women see the demand of female labor—in the Middle East and newly industrialized South Asian countries like Malaysia—as opportunities for them to participate in the migration phenomenon that transformed the historical labor migration trend in Nepal. The feminization of migration is related to the changed perception of women participating in the workforce by their own rights (IOM, 2009:24). Thus, this paper aims to gain better understanding on how Nepali former female migrants perceive and experience the feminization of labor migration. A major focus of this research is given to the women's agency to reconstruct the gender relations within their families after their migration and their contribution to the families who are left behind.

## 1.3. Research Questions

- What are the perceptions of Nepali former migrant women on 'feminization of labor migration'?
- How does the migration of female members impact on the gender relations that exist in the families?
- How do Nepali women take part in transnational practices to communicate with their families back home?
- What are the challenges they face while living away from their families?

## 1.4. Rationale and Significance of the study

The knowledge about Nepali female labor migrants are based upon the challenges that Nepali women face before and during their migration process because of their gender. Acknowledging that no discussion in female migration can be complete without recognizing women's struggles for their rights of recognition, this research is concerned with structures of inequality in the migration policies that demean the rights and agency of Nepali women in migration. The physical, sexual, and mental abuse including trafficking of Nepali women in both transit and destination countries have increased the attention of media, and researches from both national and international organization. However, few studies have addressed the positive implications of women's migration on the societies of origin and transnational families. For instance, Chandra Bhadra, in his study about the impact of Nepalese female

migrants on poverty reduction mentions that the opportunities for Nepali women in global labor market have transformed the image of women from “dependants to economic actors” (2007:14). Thus, this research does not only examine the unequal structures women face in the migration process, but also how women resist and negotiate these structures to assert their own agency. Additionally, this study seeks to fill a gap in existing literature and studies on Nepali migrant women in labor migration, by examining their agency in taking part in migration and reconstructing their gender roles in their societies. Next, this research gives a chance to the former Nepali migrant women to talk about their own perceptions about migration that can help us analyze the structures of inequality in the sphere of labor migration and legal migration policies that creates barriers to the agency of Nepali women.

### **1.5. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:**

In this section, I outline some of the key theoretical concepts that will help in understanding the situation of Nepali female migrants in the context of feminization of labor migration. The key concepts helped me to analyze the interviews, focus group discussions, and discourse analysis. The concepts that will clarify the analysis of my research are: gender, gender relations, transnationalism, social networks, domestic/reproductive labor, intersectionality, power, and panopticon.

#### **Gender :**

Gender is the activity of negotiating social conduct on the basis of normative conceptions of activities and roles appropriate for the category of one's sex (West and Zimmerman, 1987:127). "Doing" of gender is a socially accepted guidance that expresses masculine and feminine nature of doing normal activities (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126). Goffman views gender as a social construction of cultural idealization of feminine and masculine natures in everyday interaction (West and Zimmerman, 1987:130). The gendered expressions reveal the underlying dimensions of gender division of labor in terms of male work versus female work in which both women and men are obliged to analyze how to act within the social conceptions of femininity and masculinity. For instance, gender distinction in labor is framed by the social ideology that associates women as caregivers and men as breadwinners (West and Zimmerman,1987:236).

#### **Gender Relations:**

Gender relations can be understood as the relations of power between women and men that are embodied like any other social relations in division of labor, representations, and ascribing different behaviors (Agarwal, 1997:1). Gender relations are socially constructed

entities like any other structure of social hierarchy such as caste, race, and status. They are not only practiced in the division of labor and resources between women and men, but also are practiced within a culture, in ideas, and representation (Agarwal, 1997:1). Thus, gender relations act as an inevitable element in everyday discourse which is shaped by other social relations such as class and race (Flax, 1987:624). Gender relations, so far is differentiated on the basis of two genders, women and men and their relation with each other in which one exists because of the other (Flax 1987:628). In other words, it can be understood as the relation of domination between the two genders, which is most of the time controlled by the man or the patriarch society (Flax 1987:629).

### **Transnationalism:**

International migration is not only understood on the basis of the movement of people across the borders, but also on the basis of characteristics of migration depending upon the concepts of 'origin' and 'destination' (Quesada and Ghimire, 2003:23). The concept of transnationalism discusses the understanding of the migration phenomena and the relationships between the societies of origin and the destination developed by the migration populations. Migrants of all class and status participate in social, economic, political and cultural practices that extend beyond the boundaries which refers to transnationalism (Bash et al. 1994, Faist 2000 a, b, Glick Schiller et al. 1992 in Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007: 130). The transnational lens on migration allows us to understand the movement from one country to another, not only on the basis of international migration as a demographic process, but as transnational migration which creates social, cultural, political, and economic impacts in both the countries of origin and destination. The transnational theory of migration analyzes how migrants adapt and construct identities in different situations and contexts, but also how they create and re-create relationships with their families and friends through different networks such as communication and money transfer.

### **Social Network:**

The concept of social networks is a key factor that sustains the trend of labour migration in any context (Portes and Bach 1985; Massey et al., 2002 in Portes, 2007:22). Social network can be defined as the interpersonal ties that help the migrants connect with former migrants and non migrants in both origin and destination countries through friendship, kinship, and shared nationality or community (Massey et al., 1993 in Haas, 2008:19). Social networks can be further understood as the link between employers recruiting and receiving transnational organizations in both labor exporting and receiving countries (Portes, 2007:22). This phenomenon is also used to be described as 'chain migration' as it facilitates the flow of



information about migration. Massey (1989) argues that social networks results in the self-perpetuation of migration as it creates the social structure to sustain the migration process by inspiring people to migrate, thus making the government difficult to control the migration of people through immigration policies (Haas, 2008:20). The migration through irregular channels is an example that shows the strength of social networks sustaining the labor migration in Nepal.

### **Domestic Labor/ Reproductive Labor:**

Domestic labor can be defined as the labor activities related to household maintenance which can be accomplished in different forms and settings (Lan, 2003:188). Domestic labor is also referred to reproductive labor which is organized in both inside and outside the household, as paid or unpaid work creating exchange values such as emotional and monetary values (Glenn, 1992:4). Reproductive labor includes household activities such as preparing and serving food, laundering, maintaining household chores, providing care for children and old-age population, and maintaining kinship and emotional support (Glenn,1992:4). Domestic or reproductive labor is always considered as women's work; therefore, women are expected to be a good mother in their households and are expected to have experiences of housekeeping or mothering to be recruited by the employers.

### **Intersectionality :**

Intersectionality as a concept can be understood as a tool to analyze the influence of sociocultural hierarchies and power differentials in interaction of socioculturally constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality, etc. For instance, gender and race can be inferred as social constructed, intersecting, and mutually constitutive (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Lyke 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006 in Nare, 2010:69).The concept of intersectionality demonstrates how these socially constructed categories are performed in alliance with other social categories. Yet, at the same time, intersectional approach allows to see the social categories as constraining or enabling other social categories (Giddens 1984 in Nare, 2010:69). Thus, intersectionality as a concept helps to access how the intersecting social categories such as race and gender are inscribed in everyday discourse by different groups, which are related to power relations.

### **Power and Panopticon:**

According to Michel Foucault (1980: 30), power in society shapes every individual's behaviors, actions, and attitudes, including their discourses, knowledge, and everyday lives (Mason:1). Foucault believed that power exists everywhere as it acts as a kind of relation between people, with its ability to shape the behavior of the other. However, power in this

case is not understood in terms of repressive exclusion, or suppression, but in terms of knowledge from the effect that power has on people's behavior. Foucault describes the concept of power through the panopticon, Jeremy Bentham's architectural design for prisons in the mid-19th Century. Panopticon is as a modern structure of prison that allows prison guards to see inside each prison cell from their position in the high central tower, which is not visible to the prisoners (Mason: 1). In this case, since the observer is not seeable through the prison cells, the prisoners internalize surveillance by controlling their actions. In talking about Bentham's panopticon, Foucault (1977:201) argues that the purpose of the panopticon was "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Gilbert, 2009:4). In other words, the panopticon concept insists a disciplinary system in which people continuously begin to monitor themselves as if they are being surveilled by the external power. In this case, power comes from the knowledge the observer gain by observing the behaviors of those being observed (Mason: 1). However, if only a certain group control the power/knowledge, then oppression is possible in such case.

## Chapter 2

# Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview on some of the literature that contributes to the insight of the study on feminization of labor migration. This literature review is based upon the accessible literature on the discourse of migration. Thus, it synthesizes current knowledge of labor migration dynamics, including other issues that deal with the subject of migration and its impact on gender relations and transnational families.

### 2.1. Feminization of Labor Migration

Globalization is associated with a number of phenomena such as increment in capital, production of goods and new technologies and media; development in both economy and politics, and migration from different nations and regions (Sorensen, Van Hear, Engberg-Pedersen, 2002: 9). The decentralization of manufacturing production from developed countries is a key explanation for the demand of low-wage labor from developing countries (Sassen in Parrenas, 2000:563). Due to expanding economies, the standard of living of people in developed countries improves. As a result, it creates a demand and thus opportunities for low wage labor from developing and under-developed countries (Sassen in Parrenas, 2000:564). Therefore, millions of people migrate from the developing nations as labors to improve the living standard of their families back home. The term labor migration can be defined as the movement of people for the purpose of work that contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of both, the countries of origin and the countries of destination (Bhadra, 2007:10). Labor migrants act as human resources by investing their skills and effort in the host countries. According to International Labor Organization (2014), millions of migrant workers provide services in low-wage industries, constructions, domestic works, care giving, manufacturing, and agriculture in their countries of destination (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014: 23). In the context of globalization, international migration further differentiates migrants according to nationality, class, race, and more recently in terms of feminization of migration (Sorensen, Van Hear, Engberg-Pedersen, 2002: 9).

In contemporary era, global labor market has increased opportunities for both female and male migrants internationally. The rising number of independent female migrants on the basis of gender segregated labor is referred as the 'feminization of labor migration (Piper, 2005: 5). Women from the developing countries have the "coercive advantage" in the global labor market as they are offered works such as domestic labor which requires less economic

investment (Bhadra, 2007:5). As Perrenas (2000) in her study about Filipino migrants indicates, in globalization, the advanced lifestyle of the professional inhabitants requires low-wage labor such as domestic work (564). These low-paying jobs in the advanced or developed countries are the traditional works done by women, as a result of which many immigrants who respond to such works are women from developing nations (Perrenas, 2000: 564). In contemporary labor migration, the paid domestic labor in newly industrialized Asian countries and the oil-rich Gulf States has boomed the increase on the demand of female labor migrants from less developed countries from other regions of Asia (O'Neil, 2001: 54).

Domestic labor involves works in the household that replaces the unpaid domestic work of women at their home into the wage economy (O'Neil, 2001:155). Works as such in which women already have skill prior to their migration have been generating more economic opportunities for women in developed nations resulting into feminization of labor migration (Piper, 2005: 564). Although international migration for labor has been a very recent phenomenon for women, the growing number of employment opportunities in the domestic sectors in developed countries has outnumbered the number of female migrants to male in many developing countries such as Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka (D'Cunha 2003 in Bhadra,2007:10). The term 'Feminization of Migration' is used to describe the changing pattern of independent female migration for work rather than the growth of female migrants travelling abroad for other reasons (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012:3). The feminization of migration also refers to the role of independent female migrants in challenging the traditional structure of migration process by contributing to their families through remittances they send.

In the last three decades, feminization of migration from South Asia to the Gulf nations in the sectors of domestic work has triggered scholarships for migration interventions (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012:15). The discourse on feminization of labor migration has made it possible to intervene on gender-sensitive issues such as devaluation of the female migrants' skills, gendered policies in both migrant sending and receiving countries, impact of female migration in re-shaping their traditional roles in their countries of origin including the vulnerabilities that the migrants may face (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012:20).

In addition to these issues, 'feminization' is also largely linked to the 'feminization of poverty' in migration discourse (Piper, 2005: 5). Chandra Bhadra (2007:11) in his research on "International Labour Migration of Nepalese Women" mentions that the trend of the feminization of labor migration is influenced by the feminization of poverty. According to Bhadra (2007: 11), women face the burden of poverty due to the financial problems in their families and opt for employment in low sectors in the global market even in men-dominated

households. Thus, many women migrate for job opportunities in the foreign nation for fulfilling the basic needs of their families. Furthermore, Bhadra (2007:12) discusses that the remittances that female migrants send are not used for other economic or productive investment as such, but are used for the basic needs of their families such as food, education for children and improvement of their lifestyles. In addition to this, Arya and Roy (2006) in the chapter, “When Poor Women Migrate” addresses that migration of women is negotiated by poverty which makes them challenge their social hierarchies in their societies and migrate for employment in the fields such as maids, nurses, entertainers (workers in sex industry, dance bars, etc.), and factory workers (Arya and Roy, 2006: 24). Moreover, the overseas migration of women has been promoted by many countries such as Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Nepal for remittances in order to alleviate poverty by the government despite the vulnerabilities that the migrants may encounter in the countries of destination (Arya and Roy, 2006: 25). However, it should be noted that not all women who are poor get to migrate. Although feminization of migration is motivated by poverty, only those women who can invest or have other networks can migrate, which excludes the poorest women from transnational migration (Arya and Roy, 2006: 24). In such cases, the poorest may tend to migrate to the near destinations or other villages/cities within the country for temporary purpose when they desire to maintain their livelihoods (Bhadra, 2008:8).

Thus, feminization of labor migration presents a broad nexus as it is intrinsic to other gender related issues in the discourse of migration. Therefore, gender as conceptual tool should be analyzed as it is pivotal to understand the changing phenomenon of the labor migration and its impact on the lives of migrants (which I have discussed later in this review).

## **2.2. Locating Nepali Female Migrants in Feminization of Migration**

Paoletti, Sijapati, Taylor-Nicholson and Farbenblum (2014) mentions that Nepal has been estimated as the country that sends the largest number of labor workers per capita in the world (“The Exploitation-Trafficking...” 1). Gulf countries such as United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Lebanon are gaining more popularity as destination for Nepali (“The Exploitation-Trafficking...” 1). Likewise, countries in South-East Asia such as Korea and Malaysia are other countries of destination for people seeking employment overseas. There has been rapid growth in the number of Nepali attempting to work in foreign employment over the past two decades (Paoletti, Sijapati, Taylor-Nicholson, and Farbenblum, 2014: 23). However, migrating for work is not a new phenomenon among Nepali people. Labor migration in Nepal before the 1990s was dominated by men in which women

accompanied their husbands or parents (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012: 26). Migration has been a social and economic phenomenon for Nepali to migrate to India since people do not need legal documents to travel between the two countries (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:45). The open border between the two nations makes it hard to analyze how many people migrate to the other. However, the failure of the agricultural economy in 1990s resulted in poverty in the households, which led many Nepali women to move to countries other than India (Bohra and Douglas 2009 in Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012: 26). The political shift to the democratic government in the 1990s is another nexus that changed the gendered migration phenomenon in the country in which women gained access to freedom of mobility (Arya and Roy, 2006:26). Furthermore, in 2002-2007, the government of Nepal promoted the feminization of migration in the Tenth Plan to recover the economy of the country, as a result of which Nepali women then began to migrate in search of employment opportunities to the other countries of South-East Asia and the Gulf (Arya and Roy, 2006:24).

In 1970s and 1980s, the trend for overseas employment developed new dimension when the demand for relatively low-cost labor escalated in the Gulf nations (IOM, 2013:44). The demand for women domestic workers and factory laborers in the Middle East and some countries in South East Asia escalated the feminization of labor force from the developing nations such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines (IOM 2013:44). Compared to other South Asian countries, the feminization of migration in terms of labor started much later, only in the 1990s (Gurung and Khatiwada, 2013:5). The trend of migration for employment opportunities among Nepali women started in the 1990s and escalated after the year 2000 due to democratic changes in the country (Gurung and Khatiwada, 2013:5). Until 1990, there was no state mechanism to regulate and monitor the migration phenomenon for female workers in Nepal.

Nepal is one of those developing countries where a majority of women migrate for work to support the financial condition of their families (Adhikari et al. 2006 in Bhadra 2007:5). Many Nepali women are engaged in domestic labor overseas as caretakers, housekeepers, domestic workers, and factory workers in the South-East Asian countries and the Gulf (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:44). However, the total number of female migrants from the country is still undocumented as their mobility is based on irregular channels through India. According to UN Women, in the year 2013 alone there were around 3.2 million Nepali laborers abroad excluding India, in which around 90 percent were women, and 80 percent of those had travelled through irregular channels (Paoletti

Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014: 46). Nepali women work in hotels, domestic work, care giving, manufacturing including health services overseas (Paoletti et.al, 2014:44). Since a large number of Nepali female migrants have been unregistered, their records have been invisible in migration discourse.

There are several factors that motivate the irregular migration channels for the Nepali migrants. They are social and legal restrictions that encourage the irregular migration of Nepali women migrants. In the context of Nepal, women have access to fewer resources than that of men. For instance, Central Bureau of Statistic (2011) estimated that only 9 to 11 percent of women in Nepal have ownership to land and houses (Paoletti et.al. 2014:44); hence making them less able to obtain loans and pay to travel (Paoletti et.al. 2014:44). Likewise, Nepali women are marginalized from their access to mobility due to the patriarchal conception of males as the head of the families (Paoletti et.al. 2014:45). Simultaneously, the emigration policies by the government of Nepal also inhibit the migration of Nepali women for employment. For example, in 1998, the report about the sexual abuse and death of a Nepali migrant worker in Kuwait forced the government to ban women to work in the Gulf nations. Although the ban was completely lifted in 2010, the cabinet passed another decision banning all women under the age of 30 years are restricted to travel the Gulf States as domestic workers in 2012 to prevent physical, sexual, and psychological harassment of female migrants (Paoletti et.al. 2012:45). Nevertheless, women in Nepal choose to travel, despite the social and legal restriction since the migration continued to provide more opportunities for women which they do not get in their country (SAARC 2006 in Bhadra, 2007:13). Although the number of female Nepali women has been progressively increasing, it has not been able to compete with the number of male migrants (Ghimire, Gurung, Adhikari, Thieme, 2010:15). The prohibition by the government has not prevented the female migrants from crossing the border, but instead has motivated the agents or brokers to migrate the women through the Indian border and Bangladesh (Ghimire, Gurung, Adhikari, Thieme, 2010:15). The movement through the illegal channels with the help of brokers and India as a transit for instance, makes women more vulnerable to trafficking as they lack legal documents and information (Datta 2005:53)

Since the demand of female labor in works such as domestic work and care giving do not require any additional skills, women are more interested to migrate in such fields rather than staying unemployed in their home countries (O'Neil, 2001:155). While dealing with the female labor migration in Nepal, we need to consider that not all women from all background or social status migrate abroad in search of work. For instance it has been registered that a

large number of women including those who have children migrate for work due to poor financial background in their families and lack of employment opportunities (Bhadra, 2007:23). According to Bhadra (2007), travelling abroad for work has helped women to change the economic status of their families (Paoletti ,Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum 2014:44), escape domestic violence at their homes (Paoletti et.al 2014:47), and gain respect from their families and communities (Paoletti et.al 2014:51).

Feminization of labor migration is a recent, but growing phenomenon in the context of Nepal. Nepali female migrants who migrate independently are challenged by the social and legal restriction in their mobility as well as the possible vulnerabilities that they make encounter in the transit countries or the countries of destination. Despite the information about the unsafe migration, many Nepali women migrate to other countries for job opportunities in order to help their families economically or raise their standard of living.

### **2.3. Gender in Labor Migration**

Gender is an important aspect that intersects with the topic of labor migration along with race, status, and nationality. The differentiation of the labor on the basis of gender offers an example of how gender meanings are used to control or undervalue labor (Mills, 2006: 44).

According to Mills (2006: 44), gendered norms can be identified as an indistinguishable task in the global labor market in a sense that the work is divided as "men's" work and "women's" work. This process of gender and labor inequality in work can be viewed as the gender struggles in the global labor force. However, in most of the cases women are the ones to struggle in the work force because of their gender and existing systems of domination including power relations and social hierarchies. This inequality in terms of labor migration has always existed since the time of early industrial revolution. For instance, according to scholars, this phenomenon of inequalities in labor has been documented since the time that women were recruited as labor force for their high flexibility in work, disciplinary, and low wage (Dublin 1979, Tilly & Scott 1978, Tsurumi 1990 in Mills, 2006: 42). Although this phenomenon suggests the early situation of the industrial revolution in the West, it can be compared to that of the current trend of feminization of labor migration in this part of the world. For instance, participation of South Asian women in global labor market has been a recent trend as in the 20th century after the demand for low-end domestic labors was triggered in the Gulf nations (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012: 24). Although trend of moving to the neighboring country such as India has always been prevalent, migration to the Gulf nations has been labeled by the increasing movement of female labors



in low-skilled employment (NIDS 2010 in Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012:24). Thus, analyzing gender in-terms of labor migration gives attention to the gender-differentiated movement of people and their involvement in gender segregated labor market. Gender as theory contributes in the understanding of decisions that migrants make to migrate, including the field of occupation that they choose to work in (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 29). Thus, the literature discussed here scrutinizes the different dynamics of gender in the context of labor migration, since gender intersects with the systems of domination, discrimination, and exploitation in the lives of both female and male migrants (Mills, 2003: 42).

Most importantly, gender in migration study allows understanding how women engage differently from men, and how their movements make different impact within the work space and their social lives (Piper, 2005: 2). Although both females and males migrate as labors, women engage in the lowest jobs in the host countries due to the status and skill levels. Women-centric scholars stress sexual violence as a concerned issue in migration (Piper, 2005: 17). While, other scholars also acknowledge the other types of non-sexual trafficking whose victims can be both women and men (Piper, 2005: 17). Since the discourse on trafficking has been dominated by feminist approaches, sexual exploitation of women and children has been focused more due to the more focus given by feminist movements to place “violence against women” in international and national policies (Meyer and Pregeul 1999 in Piper, 2005: 17). Thus, with this influence, sexual abuse and exploitation has begun to be viewed as trafficking while the other non-sexual abuse of human rights of male migrants are considered as smuggling in international and national policy discourse (Meyer and Pregeul 1999 in Piper, 2005: 17). Although the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) involves both sexual and non-sexual abuse whose victims can be both women and men, there has been difficulty in differentiating trafficking and other human rights issues in labor migration leaving men less visible in terms of trafficking discourse (Skelon, 2000: 17 in Piper, 2005:17).

Apart from the issue of trafficking, migrant women are more vulnerable in gender segregated labor market as they are mostly "triply disadvantaged", marginalized, invisible, and poorly paid (Piper, 2005:8). Likewise, they are also deprived of their social rights and freedom mostly when women are confined in indoor works such as domestic care, house-keeping, and care-taking. Piper (2005:9) argues that the experience of female migrants is more different than that of males in a sense that their involvement in works such as domestic labor is not considered to be competent in global labor market. This issue regarding the

marginalization of women in the labor market can be further viewed critically in terms of the gender intervention in migration.

Women's migration as laborers abroad and their contribution in the economy of the host countries have gender influences (Bhadra, 2007:11). For instance, Hon. Ndioro Ndiaye (2005), Minister and Deputy Director-General of International Organization of Migration (IOM) mentions,

The specific aspects of women's migration are not dealt with separately, but are treated in the general context, which detracts from the implementation of political, legislative and regulatory measures aimed specifically at guaranteeing the empowerment of migrant women (qtd. in Bhadra, 2007:11)

It suggests that the involvement of women in migration is not analyzed on the basis of gender conventions in migration discourse. Female labor migrants are discriminated by the social and legal provisions which exclude them from accessing their individual rights. In the past, before considering gender as an intersecting variable in the field of international migration, it was presumed that women only migrate to accompany their husbands (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 28). Likewise, the field of works that women engage with were considered to be more unskilled labor and thus their participation in labor migration was usually invisible (Piper 2005:4). However, these implications on the basis of gender are still undervalued and the discrimination on the basis of gender is still practiced in both societies and global labor market.

According to Mahler and Pessar (2006:29), "gender is the meaning people give to the biological reality that there are two sexes. It is a human intervention that organizes our behavior and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process". Gender can be explained as a social construction that is implemented in everyday practices and discourse. For instance, the labor is gendered in terms of masculine and feminine work in a sense that men are involved in works that requires high strength such as construction and mining; whereas women migrate for traditionally feminized labor such as domestic works and caretaking. This construction of gender suggests the hegemony that constructs the masculine and feminine identity. For example, in the context of Nepali families, males are regarded as the breadwinners and the heads of families whereas women are expected to take care of their families and household (Paoletti, Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:45). Likewise, the international global market also segregates labor on gender basis. For example, the works that women engage in are dominated and categorized as docile and non-productive (O'Neill, 2001:154). In such cases, women are likely to face issues such as work hour

extension, no leave provision, under-payment, and physical and sexual abuse (Piper, 2005: 66). Also, since there are many cases regarding the sexual abuse of women migrant workers in the countries of destinations, all women who migrate for labor are either perceived to have been assaulted or engaged in physical relationship with their employers and other men. These examples demonstrate the gendered female labor dynamics that prevail in society of the migrants as well as in the global labor market.

Simultaneously, nation-states also amend gendered border policies and practices that limit the social rights of the female migrants. Lim and Oishi (1996) explain how gender specific immigration and emigration have been affecting female labor migrants from developing countries. According to the authors, the labor importing countries generally do not specify the skill criteria for gender-selective works which is particularly destined for women such as domestic works and care-taking. Thus, these job opportunities based on gender stereotypes suggest the work of female as unskilled jobs which marginalize them from receiving proper training in the host countries. Although women are able to have job opportunities in the Gulf countries, they are not allowed to change their employers if they require to (Lim and Oishi, 1996: 33). Also, some countries like Singapore and Malaysia restrict the migrants from becoming pregnant and therefore are required to have pregnancy test every six months and cannot marry a Malaysian citizen (Lim and Oishi, 1996:33).

Similar to the case of immigration, emigration policies also contradicts to the need of the female migrants. Lim and Oishi (1996:35) show that Asian labor exporting countries promote labor migration of both male and female migrants. However, only female are thought about needing national protection. This contradicting concern leads some governments to restrict or ban women from crossing the borders. For instance, in Nepal, the opportunities gained by Nepali women in global labor market changed the perception of women "from dependents to economic actors" (Bhadra, 2007:14). However, the government of Nepal still restricts women under the age of 30 years old from migrating to the Gulf countries due to accounts of increasing number of physical and sexual abuse of Nepali female migrants in the countries of destination. (Paoletti, Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:45). These restrictions both stigmatizes women's movement and the failure of the government to understand the necessity of protection of both male and lead to female migrants since male migrants are equally prone to violence that intersects with issues such as race, status, culture, and others. Simultaneously, while hiding men's vulnerabilities, it can also be viewed as the violation of the individual rights of women for free movement.

Considering the diverse settings and labor practices, the above discussion shows how migration is an intrinsically gendered process. Gendered hierarchies have adverse effect on the lives of both females and males differently (Mills, 2003:47). The inequality that migrants experience is shaped by gendered ideologies and hegemonic structures of the setting in both the host countries and the countries of destination. Thus, gender inequalities do not only take place in globalizing labor practices, but exists as a struggle in every cultural hegemony and social structure in relation to migration, as discussed below.

#### **2.4. Racial division of paid reproductive labor**

According to Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992), in her study about the racial division of paid reproductive labor mentions that women are generally oppressed due to sexual and gender division in the labor market; while women of color are "doubly" subordinated by their race, mainly in the context of reproductive labor. She explains that the labor market is structured in such a way that men are privileged to have opportunities to work outside their homes for paid employment; while women as housewives and mothers are assigned with reproductive labor both in private and public spheres, solely because of their gender. The integration of gender with race draws attention to the advantages of the higher-class women (white women) from the racial division of reproductive labor. The study analyses the gender and racial construction of reproductive labor during industrialization period in United States that subordinated the African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women from households to industrial economy by placing them in a lower tier of labor with low-wage and marginal jobs including restrictions on their legal and political rights. Women from less privilege groups were thought to be suited for the domestic works because they were considered to be quiet, submissive, and adapted to that standard of life. Likewise, the domestic workers were forced to act according to their employers' order. For instance, Judith Rollins and Mary Romero explain that the domestic workers were required to eat in the kitchen, wear uniforms, and be obedient to their employers (Rollins 1985 in Glenn, 1992:16). Thus, looking at the racial division of reproductive labor allow us to perceive that domestic sectors are not only constructed to be women's work, but also categorized on the basis of racial identities of the women. Gender and race are socially constructed systems which are always influenced by particular context and time (Glenn, 1992:32). Keeping that in mind, the intersection of gender and race cannot be used as static and fixed systems to scrutinize other circumstances. However, the concept can help us understand the trajectories of how reproductive labor has been transformed or varied on the basis of these concepts in different

contexts. The racial segregation of labor explains the nuances of reproductive labor that place women of disadvantaged racial groups in structural hierarchy where the employers fail to acknowledge the identities of the domestics as wives and mothers in their own households. Given that both gender and race are socially constructed concepts that influence the "material conditions, identities, and consciousness of all women" (Glenn, 1992:3), the theory of racial segregation of labor helps to understand the structural hierarchy in reproductive labor that institutionalize certain authorities, rules, and segregations on the lives of migrant women as workers.

## **2.5. Addressing Gender Relations in Labor Migration**

Gender relations are socially constructed entities like any other structure of social hierarchy such as cast, race, and status that are practiced in the division of labor and resources between women and men within a culture (Agarwal, 1997:1). Gender relation is assigned as a relation of tension in any gendered aspects or phenomenon in different societies (Agarwal, 1997:29). For instance, labor migration can be understood as a gendered framework that has reciprocal relationship with the gender relations (King and Vullnetari, 2012: 209). In their study on gender relations, King and Vullnerari (2012) address the relationship between migration and gender relations in case of Albania. In the study, authors analyze how labor migration among Albanians is affected by the patriarchal family values in Albanian societies and gendered immigration policies in the countries of destination (King and Vullnetari, 2012:209). In case of female migrants in Albania, freedom of mobility for employment is inhibited by the patriarchal notions of the societies. For instance, although few legal opportunities are provided for the Albanian women in post-communism Albania in 1990s to leave their country for job opportunities, traditional male dominated patriarchy still inhibits those women from moving to the other countries. For example, migration of work is mostly categorized as a 'heroic' journey as they believe is a notion that 'men' should provide their families need through their sacrifice and hardship. Therefore, women were almost invisible in labor migration in Albania (King and Vullnetari 2003 in King and Vullnetari, 2012:214). However, in contemporary period, the feminization of labor migration in Albania to the neighboring countries like Greece and Italy for domestic and care assistance changed the nature of labor migration in Albania (King and Vullnetari, 2012:214). These women who migrated for job opportunities sent remittances to their mothers or daughters (with approval of the male relatives). This female-to-female transmission of income through employment is seen as a form of resistance against the masculine hegemony (King and Vullnetari,

2012:216). This also supports the challenge of feminization of migration to the predominant gender relations in Albanian societies. Likewise, the authors also mention how migration of the male bread-winners in Albanian families has reconstructed gender relations. For instance, when the husbands leave the household for employment opportunities in the other countries, women become the head of the remaining family which allows them to become the temporary head of the family, which gives them power to control the household and capitalize the money sent by their male counterparts (King and Vullnetari, 2012:2015). These examples of Albanian migrants show how migration as a changing phenomenon can make an impact on reshaping the gender relations in the countries of the migrants.

In addition the Albanian case, Heidi Kaspar's (2005) study on the gender aspects of the out-migration for labor in Nepal discusses the changing patterns on gender relations among women and men in relation to international labor migration in Kalabang village of Western Nepal. Kaspar (2005) illustrates that international migration for labor is dominated by men, either married or single. Most males had been migrating to India for labor in the history while they prefer to go to Gulf countries such as Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia at the present time. Although men are the breadwinners in most of the households in Kalabang, both men and women participate equally in other works such as household works, agriculture, and taking care of children. However, when the male members migrate for economic purpose, women in Kalabang take the responsibility of household and decision-making power for temporary period of time till the husbands return (Kaspar, 2005:86). This study when compared to that of Albania shows the differences in the position of women in the male-dominated societies. Also, they show how gender relations are flexible with relation to migration and other social values such as culture and beliefs. Likewise, the studies also shows how gender relations with respect to labor migration of the male migrants makes impact on the lives of women who have less power and agencies compared to that of males in those societies. Also, the comparison on the study of gender relations between Albania and Nepal suggest the gender disparities that are situated in contradiction to the temporary change in power relations.

Other literature has emphasized the impact of women's migration on social roles and their challenges to gender relations. For instance, Curtis, Richard F. and MacCorquodale (1990) examine the aspects of gender relations in American societies that are either changing or resisting the changes. In the article, the authors argue how the influence of power struggle, patriarchy, and traditional rituals and beliefs that people experience in their everyday discourse of their lives reshape relations between men and women and their identities either

by reconstructing it or making the traditional beliefs and values more stable (Curtis, Richard F. and MacCorquodale, 1990:152). According to the article, when women take part in those social relations, they develop changes in the pre-existing gender relations which are primarily dominated by men (Curtis, Richard F. and MacCorquodale, 1990:150). However, the study reflects the 20th century American experience and thus, can be compared to that of the South Asian perspective. However, the studies finding regarding the re-construction of gender relations with the involvement of women in social relations can be compared to that of the South Asian perspective.

Kaur's (2006) study of female domestic workers in Delhi shows that women's migration for employment opportunities to the developed cities like Delhi has been able to challenge the patriarchal discipline of their families and social relation. Women who travel for better job opportunities in the sectors of low-skilled labors like domestic works in the urban areas do not necessarily leave their cultural values and responsibilities in rural lives and therefore in most of the cases, the patriarchal values of the society remain unchanged (Kaur, 2006:208). For instance, in domestic sectors women laborers face problem to protect their sexual integrity as they are suspected by the societies and may experience harassment from their male employers. On the other hand, entering into paid work empowers women as they can contribute to the families like that of their husbands (Kaur, 2006:209). Likewise, most women who have migrated for work do not wish to move back to their own village as they are more independent in the urban areas than that in their homes (Kaur, 2006:210). This study on the feminization of labor migration within a country can be compared to that of the transnational labor migration as both of them structure in similar structural frameworks despite the distance.

In conclusion, study on gender relations allow to analyze the social world, history, and gender within the context where gender is examined, practiced, or culturally accepted (Flax, 1987:12). Additionally, it allows to understand the social relations related to gender and social hegemony in different time and context as the common attributes remains the same (Brumer 2008:13). Also, gender relations in every society remain flexible and are intrinsic to other social phenomena such as labor migration and women empowerment.

## **2.6. Negotiating with Transnational Families**

In contemporary study of migration, scholars have now recognized the transnational relations of migration. The transnational perspective in migration scholarships analyzes how

migrants maintain various kinds of ties to their home countries while involving into the countries that they are living in (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007:130). This allows migration to be seen as assimilating with more than one nexus in which migrants co-ordinate with their social, cultural, and political practices not only between the countries of origin and destination, but also other places around the world in which migrants can connect (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007:131). Since migration is not only one-way process, migrants of all status participate in social, economic, religious, political, and familial practices that extends beyond borders while they become part of other places where they stay (Bash et al. 1994, Faist 2000a, b, Glick Schiller et al., 1992 in Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007:130). These transnational practices that migrants engage in influence the lives of both the migrants and those who are left behind. The migration experience is conceptualized on the basis of social networks and relations across borders between those who move and those who stay behind creating transnational communities (Levitt & Nyberg-Sorensen 2004 in Piper, 2007:14). Such transnational social relations are initiated by transnational family as family ties are important for both the migrants and those who stay behind (Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:154). Transnational families can be defined as families that live separated from each other either for small or long period of time, but yet express togetherness, welfare, and unity despite their distance (Bryceson and Vuerela in Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:157). An account on transnational family ties introduces the impact of transnational migration on those who are left behind and the power relations that sustain within transnational family ties. The first concern of this review is to locate transnational activities in feminization of migration. The second section concerns how transnational family ties differ according to the gender of the migrants.

Within feminization of migration scholarships, different families issues such as divorce and separation, teenage pregnancies, children's psychological effect, and husband's alcoholism have been seen as an effect of female migrants who leave their families behind (Gamburd, 2000; Salazar Parrenas, 2003 in Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:157). However, Sorensen and Guarnizo (2007) argue that in order to consider the relationship between the feminization of migration and disorganized family ties, we should first take into account the position of women in the destined countries and understand their capability to maintain the family relations and network (Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:157). For instance, the authors analyses different cases of Colombians and Dominicans female migrants who migrate for job opportunities in Europe. The author mentions how the poor Dominicans female migrants migrate for the low-skilled domestic service in Europe. Many of those who migrate are from



rural areas that have to compromise their family relationships in order to be stable in their work as they remain separated for long terms from their children (Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:165). Although they cannot provide physical care for their children, they send remittances for their education and share emotional care and support.

The growing demand for the female migrants in the developing countries for domestic and care-taking services has been argued to have affected the lives of the family members of the migrants, especially children (Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:161). The phenomenon of feminization of labor migration is indicated to have been importing care and love from the poor and developing countries to the rich and developed countries leading the children of the migrants to suffer from "care-drain" (Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:161). With the increasing discourse on the effect of migration on transnational families, Parrenas (2001) examines how Filipino female migrants negotiate motherhood with distance and how the gendered ideologies of women as nurturer have been challenged by the feminization of labor migration. Women are expected to provide care as a nurturer in both at households as well as in the labor field such as domestic works and care-taking in global labor market (364). When Filipino women migrate for work, their children suffer from care-drain. Filipino women generally migrate to improve the lifestyles of their families by sending their income for the well-being of the families and are praised by the government for being "economic heroes" (Parrenas, 2001:382). On the other hand, they are expected to follow culturally and ideologically inscribed roles as nurturer to their children and therefore are accused to be responsible for the "broken homes" (Parrenas, 2001:387). Transnational homes as such are considered as "broken" homes as the migrant mother fails to keep the traditional expectations of motherhood (Parrenas, 2001:381). In order to fill the gap, the migrant mothers reconstitute the role of nurturer in the families hiring other women from lower status as a care-taker back in the Philippines (Parrenas, 2001:369). However, they do not regain their status for not being a good mother for their children. These studies draw on the paradoxical effect of feminization of labor migration in transnational families. Although the female migrants taking part in the labor migration send remittances for the betterment of their families and children, they are challenged by the gendered ideologies and expectations. Thus, the literary works reviewed in this section suggest the importance of looking at the position of women in the household and at workspace before claiming their inability to provide the expected social relations with the transnational families.

Contrary to the challenges faced by the migrants in maintain relationship with their transnational families, little literature has focused on the transnational fathering in migration despite migration being dominated by males in many regions. Due to the gender-ideological norms of fathers as the breadwinner and mother as homemaker, fathering from the distance has not been considered as an important issue in the study of transnational families (Fenstermaker and West 2002 in Parrenas, 2008:1057). Parrenas (2008) in the study on transnational fathering explains the role of father in maintaining distance relationships with their children in the context of the Philippines. In contrast to the female Filipino migrants, male migrants do not reconstitute gender by substituting the roles of the father by other males or females (Parrenas, 2008:1058). Instead, the migrant Filipino men perform transnational fathering by imposing discipline and authority to their children (Parrenas, 2008:1058). While performing the role of father, the male migrants hold the traditional masculine notions of being 'men' and 'fathers' (Fenstermaker and West 2002 in Parrenas, 2008: 1058). In doing so, the fathers do not show emotional affection to the children. Instead, they maintain the responsibility of discipline among the children (Medina 2001 in Parrenas, 2008:1058). Likewise, the migrant fathers are compelled to follow the traditional ideological views of masculinity in the Filipino family, as a result of which they have to invest in the renovation of the house in order to determine the criteria of becoming successful in maintaining their masculinity or breadwinner status (Parrenas, 2008:1063). However, while maintaining transnational ties with their children, the migrant men are found to be communicating less with their children than that by the female migrants via communication means such as mobile phones.

In conclusion, the migration of both females and males create gap in the lives of the families who are left behind, mostly children. Migrants of both genders negotiate to fill their absence in the transnational families according to the traditional gendered ideologies associated with the roles of being a good mother or a good father in their societies. However, transnational ties of father with their families have been studied at the minimal level than that of the migrant mothers.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Research Methodology and Ethical Considerations**

This chapter discusses the methodology and ethical issues that I had considered in my study. Qualitative research method was applied in this study as it allows in identifying the possible issues related to the topic from the perspective and experience of the participants (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011:9). Since this study aims to understand and explain the impact of feminization of migration, qualitative method can be useful in exploring and addressing the perceptions and experiences of former migrant women in relation to the impact on gender relations and transnational families.

### **3.1. Research Design and Research Methods**

In this qualitative research, I primarily used three methodologies for the collection of data. They are: in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, and discourse analysis.

In-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting individual interviews with the participants to explore their perspectives on a particular topic of the study (Boyce and Neale, 2006:3). In my research, in-depth interview with the former migrant women provided detailed information about their thoughts and experiences related to my topic that helped me to explore the impact of their migration on their lives. This technique was mostly beneficial for talking with participants who do not feel comfortable while talking openly in a group. Acknowledging that every method has its weakness, the responses in the in-depth interview can be biased (Boyce and Neale, 2006:3). For instance, the participants had space to give their own opinion without the interruption of others making the data fully based on their subjectivity. Likewise, the in-depth interview tended to be time consuming.

The second method that I used for the data collection was focus group discussion. Powell et al. describe a focus group as a group of selected individuals in a research who participate, discuss, and comment on the topic of the research from their personal experiences (Gibbs, 1997: 1). The focus group session allowed the participants in my research to share their experiences and opinions with each other within a short period of time. The advantage

of including focus group discussion in my research was that it allowed the participants to come up with new topic that I had not included in my questionnaire. Although focus group discussion has many advantages, one of the limitations that I found in the focus group discussion was that it was open ended and could not be predetermined (Gibbs, 1997:1). Therefore I, as a researcher, had little control over the interaction between the participants to keep them entirely focused on the topic.

The third research method that I used in my research was discourse analysis in which the primary focus was on analyzing the discourses on female migration in Nepal through newspaper articles and migration policies. Discourses, according to Michel Foucault (1972) are institutionalizations of power and knowledge that either constrain or enable what we speak, think, and write about certain groups, subjects, or practices in particular time and context (Saroca, 2013:413). The discourse analysis in this research explores the impact of newspaper articles and migration policies on constructing people's perceptions about Nepali migrant women. Likewise, I am comparing the texts with the conversation with the participants that allow me to scrutinize the differences in the perception on feminization of Nepali women migration among former migrant women and their societies. The drawback of discourse analysis in this research is that it is based upon few texts with similar discussions and therefore does not analyze the other texts critiquing the current discourse on Nepali female migrants. Thus, acknowledging the limitations in every research techniques, I tried to fill the gap by adapting more than one method in this study to ensure the validity of the research.

### **3.2. Research Sample**

The population of the study was former Nepali female migrants as the purpose of the study was to gain information from their experience and opinion on the topic of feminization of migration. Purposive snowball sampling method was adopted in order to reach the respondents. Purposive sampling strategy was adopted as the sample size was not fixed prior to data collection.

Since the research group was not easily accessible through random sampling strategies, snowball sampling strategy was applied as it helps to find and recruit "hidden populations" through the social networks from the informants or participants who contribute in the study (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guset, and Namey, 2005: 6). Many former migrant women, whom I met before my field work, were reluctant to share their migration experience. Subsequently, I proposed *Pourakhi*, an organization in Kathmandu to help me

reach the targeted population for the study. *Pourakhi*, an NGO formed by returnee migrant women, transmits information on safe migration and assists the needs of returnee women migrant workers.

Purposive sample size was chosen as it helps to decide the sample size on the basis of response of the participants (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guset, and Namey, 2005: 5). In other words, the sample size in my research was decided after no new insights—which further helps in the developing new theories—were generated among the participants. The sample of the study included twenty former female migrants who have spent their lives as migrant workers in the Middle East (Kuwait, Israel, and Saudi Arabia) and South East Asian countries like Malaysia. Studies were conducted in the central and Eastern development regions of Nepal in Kathmandu and Jhapa districts, respectively.

### **3.3. Research Site:**

The primary research for this study was carried out in Kathmandu district on July 2014. The reason for choosing this sample site was based on the knowledge that many former migrant women from the eastern and the western regions migrate to the city for employment opportunities (Bhadra, 2007:18). Similarly, it was convenient to conduct interviews in Kathmandu, particularly because many former migrant workers from all parts of the country stay there seeking opportunities to go abroad or file claims regarding migration related issues (Paoletti, Sijapati, Taylor-Nicholson, and Farbenblum, 2014:35). However, only two women in Kathmandu took part in the research.

The second site for the research was in Jhapa district in Eastern development region in Nepal. The second site was referred by *Pourakhi* as they had regional office in that particular district. Thus, eighteen participants participated in the study in Jhapa. According to DoFE, large numbers of female migrants are from Jhapa district (Paoletti, Sijapati, Taylor-Nicholson, and Farbenblum, 2014:40).

All twenty participants in the study took part in individual in-depth interview; while only five participants in the focus group took part in the focus group discussion. The research sites for the interviews were chosen by the participants themselves. Some participants preferred to interview at their home, while some felt more comfortable to talk outside their home. In such cases, research sites were chosen according to their preference. Individuals who did not want to meet at their homes preferred to meet in cafés. The focus group discussion in Jhapa was carried out in a room inside a hotel, where I stayed during my field work.

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations

While conducting the research, it was necessary to address ethical considerations. Before starting the field work, the research procedure was evaluated by The Institutional Review Board of the Asian University for Women (AUWIRB) in order to ensure the ethical principles in the study which include: respect, beneficence, and justice for the participants. I was funded US\$ 200 from the department of Asian Studies at AUW, which covered the expenses of my project. The grant was spent on transportation from Kathmandu to Jhapa and accommodation in Jhapa. Likewise, it covered the transportation fees of the participants who spent their time and money to take part in the interviews. On the basis of the required ethical principles, the research ensured ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and self-reflexivity.

Before the interview, all the participants were handed the written informed consent document and information sheet which explained the purpose and procedure of the study [See appendix]. As an interviewer, I explained the documents clearly in Nepali language and discussed the purpose and significance of the study. Likewise, the participants were given time to think about the interview as it required sufficient time. None of the participants were hurt physically or emotionally during the process of the field work. Similarly, the participants were informed that the participation in the study was voluntary before the interviews or group discussions. I treated the participants respectfully as my research would be incomplete without their participation.

Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained to ensure no identification of participants was revealed by others (Richards and Schwartz, 2002:138). Before the interview I asked the participants whether or not they wish to remain anonymous in the research because as per .... In some circumstances, participants may not like to remain anonymous and maintain ownership of their ideas or narratives (Richards and Schwartz, 2002:138). Likewise, I asked the participants before recording their voices in the recording device. However, many women during the interview were not comfortable in sharing their names or recording their voices as they were skeptical about the use of data after the research. In such case, I had to depend upon hand written notes. The data gathered from the participants were stored in my personal hard drive (with password) which was only accessible to me.

Self-reflexivity was addressed in the research by involving 'self' with the research throughout the process and learning from it (Dickson-Swift, James, and Liamputtong, 2008:24). It was important to be self-reflexive throughout the research process as I had my own biases as a researcher which could have affected both the research process and the result

of the study. Thus, before taking the interview, I was aware that the issue of violence and traumatic experiences may come up during the interviews that may make the participants uncomfortable. In order to avoid that kind of situation, I did not include any questions that ask the participants to share such experience. Also, by putting my 'self' in the place of the interviewees, I narrowed the gap between the participants and myself as an interviewer. I was aware whether or not the questions were clear enough to understand or had negative implications that might hurt the participants. More importantly, I addressed them respectfully for being part of my research.

### **3. 5. Research Analysis Method:**

I used grounded theory for the analysis of the findings. Grounded theory helps to build up theories and concepts of the social world that we are studying (Hennik, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011: 208). Grounded theory method consists of systematic guidelines for analyzing qualitative data to construct theoretical analysis based on the data collected (Charmaz, 2006:5). In my field work, all interviews and focus group discussions were conducted primarily in Nepali, which I later translated and transcribed into English. The notes and data from the interview were later synthesized through coding. Coding is a label given to the data segments that depicted similar themes that emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006:5). Later, I selected the repetitive themes that emerged from the coding of the data and then compared, analyzed, and have presented as findings of my research in Chapter 4.

### **3.6. Research Limitations:**

The data in this study has several limitations. First, both male and female former migrants were thought to be interviewed for the comparison between their impacts in gender relations. However, only two males were interviewed for the study due to lack of interaction with the organizations that deal with the issues of Nepali male migrants. Likewise, the responses of the interviewed male migrants have not been included in this study because of the irrelevance of their experience in this topic of research. For instance, this research mainly emphasizes on the migration experience of female labor migrants and therefore, the interviews with the male labor migrants reflected that they had less knowledge about the unequal structures in the migration structures in terms of gender. Likewise, their assumptions about female migrants in the countries they had worked were based upon what they have heard from media and societies. Thus, including male voice in this research would have taken the study in different discourse as they also experience difficulties and struggle during their

migration process. Second, the women interviewees were reluctant to share the amount of income that they earned; likewise, many were unwilling to go into details when asked questions about the kind of jobs they deal with. Also, the field research was conducted primarily in Nepali which was then translated into English. Although I tried my best to ensure the accuracy of the translation, there can be a possibility that the nuances were lost in translations.



## Chapter 4

# Findings and Analysis

The sections in this chapter are organized thematically on the basis of the themes that emerged from the interviews, focus group discussion, and discourse analysis. These selective themes are analyzed as the findings of my research study. The themes that are selected for the analysis are: Migration decision and motivation, continuity of domestic labor, transformation of gender relations within families, and negotiation with transnational families. Reflecting the qualitative data analysis, my findings contribute to the theory of the feminization of migration in the context of Nepal. However, the findings are based upon the data from 20 participants who contributed in the study and cannot be generalized to examine broad gendered patterns in the context of Nepal. The names of the participants have been changed in order to ensure confidentiality.

### **4.1. Decision and motivation of Nepali women to migrate:**

In order to examine the trend of feminization of labor migration among Nepali women, I analyze the collected qualitative data in my field work. Relying on the most recent available quantitative data of labor migration in Nepal, I analyze the patterns of female labor migration and demographic factors associated with migration. I expand the better understanding of these patterns by comparing it with the findings from the data collected from the former Nepali female migrants, which provides reliable and valuable insights into the feminization of migration and its trend in Nepal.

According to Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (2011), Nepal's adoption of policies on foreign employment, the conflict of Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006, the economic boom of the destination countries, and lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas are found to be the major factors contributing the migration of both male and female labor migrants (Sharma, Pandey, Pathak, and Sijapati-Basnet, 2014:44). Depending only on the demographic data limits the understanding of gender patterns and individual migration histories that foster the migration of Nepali women. Considering that the inspection on the individual experiences of the migrants provides different patterns for the decisions of Nepali women to migrate, the data collected in this study provide complete individual migration experiences and personal motivations of migrants to participate in the trend of feminization of labor migration.

With the evolution of the feminization of female labor migration since the 1990s, the demographic report of labor migration suggests that migration to the Gulf countries and Malaysia are the popular destinations for Nepali women (Sharma, Pandey, Pathak, and Sijapati-Basnet, 2014:43). It is assumed that the rate of increase in migration of Nepali women is higher than that of Nepali men (Bhadra, 2013:14). The assumption is based on the argument that the impact global recession in the Gulf countries affected the demand of male migrants due to the slowdown of development in the beginning of 2008 (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012:3). The global recession, however, did not affect the demand of labor for informal sector in domestic labor where majority of Nepali migrant women are engaged.

The participants who contributed in the study had migrated between the years 2000/2001 to 2011/2012. Among twenty former female migrant workers who participated in the study, 9 women had been to Kuwait, 8 had been to Saudi Arabia, 3 had been to Malaysia, 2 had been to Israel; while only single number of participants had been to Oman and Lebanon. On the other hand, two women had traveled to more than three countries for better job opportunities. All the participants who worked in the Gulf countries were engaged in domestic labor, while those in Malaysia had worked in manufacture industries. Some of these women have been back in vacation for their family reasons; while some have returned for their children. On the other hand, many women complained restrictions and abuse as the cause of their return to Nepal. However, majority of the participants want to or are in the process of migrating to new destinations for employment opportunities. All of the participants mentioned their decision for migration was independent. Out of twenty women who participated in the research, 4 women were single when they migrated; while the others were already married.

The role of these former migrant workers in making independent migration decisions suggests the transformation in the traditional norms of women accompanying their husbands or families in the process of migration. As discussed in the literature review, migration in Nepal, before the 1990s, was dominated by male migrant workers, in which women usually accompanied their husbands and relatives. Due to the patriarchal beliefs, Nepali women were prevented from independent movement due to lack of reliable networks and lack of financial support for women (Adhikari 2006 in Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012:30). Nepali societies are based upon the traditional patriarchal framework in which women have access to fewer resources and land ownership compared to that of men and have lower advantage to obtain loans or pay to migrate (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:44). Other research on feminization of labor migration in Nepal mentions poverty as the driving

factor for women to migrate in order to handle financial problems and fulfill basic needs of their families (Bhadra, 2007:11). However, I argue that the women who migrate are not necessarily the poorest of the poor as they need financial investment to deal with the process of migration. In comparison to the traditional position of women in Nepali societies, the responses of the participants, who contributed in this study, resonate that women now have more opportunities to make their own decision in migration than in the past, which suggests the acceptance of women's autonomy decision to cross the borders without company of their husbands or other relatives.

The most common contributing factors in the migrant women's decision for migration are for employment opportunities, better future for their children, and other family issues such as divorce and unemployment of male members in the families. When asked about their decision to migrate, the common responses of women are;

“I wanted to send my daughter in boarding school. I was engaged in farming before, but there was no profit. So I took this decision.”  
Rita, age 30

“For jobs in Nepal, you need good profile, experience, and education. I am illiterate and never had job experience. So I thought [migration] was only an alternative left for me,” Rani, age 26

“I was not educated or skilled to find a job here. So I thought to go to [Malaysia],” Sharmila, age 22

“I went to [Kuwait] to earn for my family. I wanted a secure future for my children,” Jyoti, age 35

“Sitting here in [Nepal] would was not good for me. I did not have job and I would not get job,” Ramila, age 30

The findings suggest that most of the participants migrate for employment opportunities and better future for their children. Before migrating to the destination countries, the participants who were already married stayed as housewives or engaged in farming or household chores. On the other hand, single women were unemployed and helped their families in farming or other house related works. The lack of education was the found to be common challenge for these women to compete in the job market. All of the participants in the study either have not received education or have only completed their primary school

level. Similarly, lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas and little profit in agriculture business were the other driving factors that motivated the women in Jhapa district of Nepal to seek employment opportunities abroad. However, none of the participants had job experiences before making the decision to migrate. Unemployment has been the major cause for Nepali people both men and women from all background and age groups to migrate overseas. The rise of population opting for employment opportunities was seen in the year 1998/99 and 2001/02, due to the lack of employment opportunities and political unrest caused by Maoist insurgency in the country (Sharma, Pandey, Pathak, and Sijapati-Basnet, 2014:46). However, although the majority of the participants in the study had migrated during 2001-2006, none of the participants introduce the political upheaval as the driving factor for their decision.

Other than the lack of employment opportunities and better future for the children, majority of women mentioned that the successful migration stories of their neighbors, relatives, or friends motivated for their decision to migrate. For instance, for the same question on the reason behind the purpose of migration, some participants answered,

"No one said, anything, I just had this desire to work like those that I had seen in my neighborhood," Sita, age 29

"I took this decision to go abroad after seeing many women leaving for work in Gulf countries," Gita, age 31

"Everyone in the village was leaving to work abroad, so I thought to give it a try," Reena

Here, the participants' responses suggest the continuing trend of feminization of labor migration in Nepal, although women have recently participated in the labor market than men. This phenomenon of continuing the path of other women can be viewed as the motivations for the women to migrate. Likewise, it suggests the changing social attitudes towards independent mobility of Nepali women. The individual expectations about the possible advantages in the destination countries, by seeing the progress of the other people who have migrated can be understood more clearly by the concept of social networks.

Social networks as dynamics of transnational migration operate as the key factor for enhancing the migration flows. In most of the cases, women who had some network with their families or relatives abroad gained information about the job opportunities and migration procedure from them. Similarly, the decision of choosing the destination depends

upon what they have heard from the returnees. For instance, women who prefer Malaysia as the destination stated that they heard that working in manufacturing industries was easier than working as housemaids. Likewise, during the focus group discussion, I came across Israel being the next potential destination among women who want to migrate again. Their discussion suggests that women are paid well in Israel compared to other countries. Such discussions are the effect of the flow of information through social networks.

However, not all women had opportunity of communicating with those who have migrated. In such case, social networks through some other actors helped these women participate in migration process. Foreign employment from Nepal is managed by both public and private actors that regulate information about employment industries overseas and create social network links between the migrants and employers in receiving countries. The Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) located in Kathmandu acts as the leading government agency for labor migration, which regulates, administers labor migration frameworks, provide permits for the migrant workers, and approves recruitment agencies' applications for employment opportunities (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:52). However, the government of Nepal does not act as direct mediator between recruiting companies and migrant workers except for South Korea (*ibid* 51). Thus, majority of women who migrate via illegal channels depend upon private actors. In case of the findings, individual agents and manpower agencies create social networks links by sharing information about the job opportunities abroad for potential migrant women. All of participants motivated by the trend of migration of other women in their neighborhood, had migrated through the help of individual agents and recruitment agencies also known as manpower companies. When asked about the process of migration, Devi stated,

I was around 16 years old when I went for Saudi Arabia. Since I was not eligible to go abroad because of my age, I got my passport from Illam (another district) and increased my age to 19 years. I left with my agent to Delhi and then Bombay with another agent. It took 17 months to reach Bombay... I almost lost my hope of living. I thought I will end up in some brothels in Bombay. Later, I flew to Saudi Arabia from Bombay airport.

Here, Devi's response resonates how individual agents or manpower agencies as social networks connect the potential migrants with employment in the destination countries. Like Devi, other women also travelled with the help of either individual agents or manpower companies in order to circumvent legal documents and work permits from the DoFE. These social network actors supply labor to the destination countries by helping people who are ineligible for getting government permit due to their age limit or restriction to the countries of

destination as discussed in the literature review. Additionally, the government procedures are said to be expensive for the workers or the jobs which pay below the minimal requirements, set by the government of Nepal, are not accepted for visa permit (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:46). Likewise, many women travel with tourist visa to go abroad and then overstay there. For example, Rashmi answered,

I had my brother working in Israel and I went with a tourist visa and stayed there illegally for five and half years ...

Among twenty participants, only two women had traveled with tourist visa in Israel through social networks with their relatives. On the other hand, other participants depended upon the recruitment agencies and individual agents for the information about job opportunities. The data shows the popularity of agents and recruitment agencies in Nepal, who motivate people to seek job opportunities in the destined countries. The use of agents or manpower agencies put migrant workers' lives at risk during their journey of migration. Due to lack of information about the required payment for procedure, job positions in the destination, and authenticity of the documents required for the migration process, migrants are deceived by such agencies (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:66). Additionally, migration through illegal channels with illegal documents makes these women invisible from receiving government assistance in the countries of destinations. Also, they become vulnerable to robbery and harassment in the transit countries and undesirable conditions in the destinations.

Ironically, the legal barriers and implementation of the gendered laws against the migration of Nepali women are challenged by the trend of feminization of labor migration in Nepal. For example, in the year 2002, the government of Nepal banned women under the age of 30 years of age from working in the Gulf as domestic workers due to the number of reported suicides and death of Nepali domestic workers in the destination countries (*ibid* 45). In the perception of the government, restricting women to participate in migration process abroad prevent women migrants from possible harms. However, I argue that these laws, which claim to provide protection for migrant women, discriminate women in terms of mobility instead. Similarly, the gendered laws, as mentioned above, contribute to the growing number of recruitment agencies and individual agents that regulate irregular migration and further risks for female migrants. Likewise, the government is seen to be aware of the irregular migration through such social networks in different parts of the country as the DoFE is responsible for providing license and monitor the conduct of such agencies (Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:53). However, due to the lack of proper

procedure for continuous assessment of such agencies and agents, the government fails to monitor the irregular migration of women.

Although Nepali women have become independent decision maker for their mobility rights, their autonomy has been restrained by the government by amending migration policies that limit women from participating in migration process. Thus, the legal framework that governs the labor migration undermines the women's rights for safe migration by enforcing private actors in motivating the migrant workers to travel through irregular channels.

#### **4.2. Continuity of Domestic labor and the intersection of gender and race**

In my understanding regarding the continuity of domestic labor by the Nepali female migrants, I draw social construction of gender and race as intersecting categories that influence the demand and supply of transnational domestic labor. Domestic labor takes place in the private space of household which is often fostered by individual employer-employee relationships in which power relations play a pivotal role. Most of the employers in domestic labor are recruited on the basis of social networks of friends, relatives, and other actors (as discussed above). However, stereotypes based on employees' gender and race play important roles for their access to job opportunities.

The economic boom in the Gulf heightened the constructions, development plans, and service sectors attracting male labor migrants from South and Southeast Asian countries (Gurung, and Khatiwada, 2013:5). On the other hand, the demand of female labor migrants as domestic workers started much later when the living standard of people in the newly industrialized improved (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012:24). My literature review on gender in labor migration finds that the demand of migrant workers in the global labor market is gendered in a sense that men are hired in masculine jobs; while, women work in the traditionally feminine jobs. It demonstrates that the labor sector is segregated on the basis of gender, in which works of males are considered as "skilled" labor while that of the females are categorized as "unskilled". Thus, it can be stated that the feminization of labor migration is linked with the global demand for domestic workers, inducing the traditional division of labor.

Nepali women are said to have a "coercive advantage" in the domestic sector as they have been performing unpaid care within their household (Bhadra, 2007:9). The demand for domestic labor has thus created opportunities for these women to change their unpaid reproductive work to paid productive work (Bhadra, 2007:10). The participants in this study who worked in the domestic sectors as migrant workers had experience of working in

household works, which made them competent for the feminized jobs market. For instance, when I asked about her perception on migration for women, Rita said,

I think it is good to migrate abroad for work. There are no job opportunities in this village, so it was necessary to work anyhow and there was no option rather than going abroad. We needed money and job. With the same work, we can at least earn money there. I had experience working in my house, so I thought about giving it a try.

Rita's perception on the employment opportunities in the Gulf suggests the continuity of domestic labor because of her experience in the domestic sector. Like Rita, other migrants also expressed similar view regarding their interest to serve their labor in the destination countries. Since domestic works is considered to be female's work, women who engage in domestic labor after migration do not receive any training before their migration. The perceptions of these women continuing their traditional roles can be related to the concept of "Doing Gender", which West and Zimmerman (1987) describes as the socially and culturally accepted guidance that suggest masculine and feminine characteristics of doing things. The concept of "doing gender" clarifies in understanding the trend of labor migration in Nepal between males and female according to the socio-cultural definitions of gender roles in the countries of origin and destinations. For example, men often participate in works outside private spheres of households. On the other hand, demand of women migrant workers are generally in reproductive sectors that are associated with emotional ties. Most women in the study continued in domestic labor as their jobs in the destination countries; while others were engaged in reproductive labor and manufacturing (esp. industries). Similar to domestic labor, reproductive labor such as providing care for children or old-age population and maintaining kinship and emotional support which are traditionally considered to be women's work in the families (Glenn, 1992:4). On the other hand, women are often part of low level jobs in the manufacturing companies in Malaysia while men work deal with work that require skills and trainings before the work. Looking at domestic labor from gender perspective allows to analyze how the labor market differentiates employment based on the traditional notions of gender. However, I argue that women who take part in gendered labor become part of the culturally segregated labor market are aware of the devaluation of their labor, but they consider the gender notion of work as opportunities to support their families as housewives, mothers, or daughters in their families. Despite the fact of the lower position that Nepali female migrants receive because of their gender in their work spheres; they position themselves as being mothers, daughters, and housewives in their families.



The domestic labor which is segregated in terms of gender intersects with racial stratification. Nepali women, who continue working as housemaids and caretaker face problems in their employers' home because of their racial stereotypes. The racial stereotypes such as innocent, naïve, and sexually submissive associated with migrant women from the least developed countries are considered to be eligible for the domestic works (Varia, 2011:281). The class difference because of the lifestyles of the employers and employees creates irregular power relations between the employers and the migrant workers who work in the field which migrants women are generally perceived to be of low status and are confined within the household. Although I had not included any questions related to the situation of working in the destination countries, the focus group discussion among the participants helped me to inspect the power relationship between the employers and Nepali female migrants as housemaids that affected the lives of migrant workers in their countries of destination. For instance, Manisha, who served as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia for 18 months, stated,

I had to work for 15 to 17 hours a day nonstop. They even took my passport and did not allow me to leave. I was not allowed to go out the house or talk with other maids. When I asked for permission to leave, they used to say that they had paid for my visa and cannot leave without ending the contract. I got to know about these things only after going there. I had no idea about those things before. Since they did not allow me to leave, I jumped out from the window to escape.

Manisha's description about her condition as a domestic worker gives us a glimpse about how domestic workers are treated by the employers inside their households. Manisha's discussion led to other participants' response on their own situation in which they shared similar experiences. The conversation suggests the domination of the employers in the lives of the migrant women by restricting them from personal autonomy. I argue that recruitment procedures, weakness of the governmental assistance in the host countries and immigration policies of the host countries make the migrant women vulnerable in their workplaces, where the employers holds authority over the personal rights of these women. As discussed earlier, Nepali women often travel illegally by depending upon the recruitment agencies for getting their visas and employment opportunities in the host countries, which make them invisible status in the host countries from receiving government assistance during the conditions as such. Likewise, the failure of the Nepali government to provide assistance to Nepali migrants in the host countries is another issue that influences such situations for the migrant workers in the host countries. For instance, Nepal fails to protect Nepali citizens abroad because it has

not been able to establish embassies in all the Gulf nations. Only four Gulf nations have Nepali embassy, while only a consulate remains in Lebanon; however, either migrant domestic workers are unaware of the information or they are restricted by their employers from going out of their households (Gurung and Khatiwada, 2013:10). Third, the immigration practices of the destination countries facilitate the unequal power relationship between the employers and the employees. For example, the immigration policies in the Middle East is based on Kafala system in which temporary working visas are issued by the sponsor (Kafeel), in which the sponsor becomes economically and legally responsible for the worker (Lori 2012 in Gurung and Khatiwada, 2013:9). Since the visa is issued for a particular Kafeel, the workers would not be able to change their job or leave without the permission from her sponsor. A similar system is followed by Malaysia and Singapore by importing labor on the basis of two-year employment visas in which their immigration status is controlled solely by the employers or sponsors who hold the authority over the migrant workers and decide the payment of wages and work duration (Varia, 2011: 278). Thus, Nepali women migrant workers who chose to migrate despite the travel risks have to continue working under certain restrictions. However, not all domestic workers face these challenges in their workplaces. For instance, women who worked in Israel for five years did not face any difficulties as caretakers. Likewise, some women in the Middle East were shocked to hear such experiences of their migrant fellows. Since the trend of feminization of migration is taking place at abundance and the experiences and stories of the migrant workers are discussed by the media and returnees, almost all of the participants mentioned that they were aware of the risks that they might have to face in their destination countries. However, few women had the knowledge and information about the immigration policies and legal support in the host countries.

Similarly, domestic and reproductive labor takes place in the household sphere between employers and employees in which trust plays as a pivotal role (Nare, 2010:70). The fear of insecurities of the high class employers, who depend upon unknown migrant women as their domestic workers, can be another factor that contributes to the racial segregation of the migrant workers in the host countries. (Nare, 2010:281) Thus, employers tend to create ownership over the domestic workers' social life outside their private spheres and sometimes monitor the behaviors of the migrant workers to determine their characters. As per the participants' focus group discussion session, they were reflexive about any of their behaviors that may convey threats and risks. For instance, Manju discussed,

In the beginning, the employers used to place all their gold ornaments and cash of moneys over the bed or leave their closet open even when they are not around. I was conscious of not touching them. Other housemaids from Ethiopia told me that the employers would check my behavior. When they found that I had not touched anything they stopped doing those these things later on. But I had to be always careful about talking to other maids or finding any valuable things around the household.

Considering Manju's discussion, the situation mirrors Foucault's concept of panopticon. While applying this concept to the position of the participants, the employers can be considered as a social institution based on power structure upon which the participants monitor their behaviors as if they are being watched by their employers. Manju's description about checking her own behavior as if being surveilled by her employers suggests that she was reflexive about what she was doing because of the fear of being watched. By monitoring their own behavior, the domestic workers understate their risks of being harmed or misbehaved. Likewise, the position of women in such situations is also evident with women working in factories in Malaysia, where they had to deport themselves in certain manner such as not talking to the male factory members from the same country or socializing with them. Thus, racial stratification intersecting with gender segregation of domestic labor can be observed in every situation of the migrant workers which undermines their position not only because of the gender, but because of the stereotype attached to the migrant workers as not being from the same class or status.

#### **4.3. Gender Relations in the families of the returned migrant women workers**

Gender relations in intersection with other social structures such as gender and race are practiced on the basis of socially constructed ideas and representations of women and men, and their behavior patterns. Societies often differentiate roles and hierarchical positions in relations to gender; however, these social constructions change and vary over time and circumstances. For instance, the feminization of labor migration has been changing predominant gender relations between women and men in Nepali societies by making women be their own agents to make migration decision and the provide economic support to the families who are left behind. Although Nepali migrant have to face challenges and risks during their stay as labor migrants in the host countries, they play an important roles in reconstructing the gender relations in their societies. Traditionally, Nepali societies are based upon patriarchal perceptions in which only men becomes the breadwinners for their families (Bhadra, 2007 in Paoletti, Taylor-Nicholson, Sijapati, and Farbenblum, 2014:45). Nepali

families are thus, organized in hegemonic structures in which male member of the families hold the highest position as the wage earner of their families and are considered of having more power than the females. Likewise, the patriarchal approaches are inhibited by the migration policies makers (as discussed before), by segregating migration laws according to gender. For instance, the policy, in which women below the age of 30 years are banned from migrating to the Gulf nations because of the stereotypes associated with women workers as being vulnerable, demeans the agency of women and their rights for mobility. Additionally, even while talking about the impact of migration on gender relationships, researchers have focused on the changes in the roles of the housewives as decision makers after the migration of the male members within their households and little have been talked about the case of women migrant workers reconstructing the gender relations in their households or societies. However, patterns as such have been transformed by the transnational feminization of labor migration.

Nepali women who make their decision to participate in transnational labor migration have challenged the traditional roles of women as only housewives, mothers, and daughters. Although women who opt for labor migration are generally stigmatized by the kinds of works they engage in the destinations countries, most of them have been examples for other women from their villages or neighborhood to migrate for employment opportunities abroad. The transnational participation of women in labor market has thus provided women with opportunities to challenge the traditional gender relationships that existed in their families before their migration. For instance, Pooja and Arati while talking about the impact of her migration stated,

If the people who did not go abroad for earning had stayed back and tried to earn here, it would have taken them lots of time and investment. So it is kind of good that people got this chance .I had never experienced inequalities, but I think this opportunity have given women chance to contribute economically. We would be sitting in our houses if we had not gone there. We would be totally dependent upon our husbands or fathers or brothers. That would make women sit quiet and take care of others. But now since lot of women had migrated, they are sending money back home which makes the couple equal to each of them helps the family. After I returned, my husband went to Malaysia with my savings. (Pooja)

Before, only families with sons used to send their children for work. But now even families with only girls perceive this trend positively. Even daughters are now expected to contribute in the families equally like that of sons. It was not thought about before, but now, there is more equality when it comes to people travelling for work. It does not matter whether they are sons or daughters or

husbands or wives. So I think the society's perception on what women can do is changing these days. (Arati)

Here, Pooja's response suggests the changing dynamics in gender relations after her migration to Kuwait. Although there have not been much differences in terms of gender in the families of the migrant workers, the gender relations between women and men can be observed in the societies under patriarchal system. Similar to Pooja, other Nepali women who decided to migrate for employment opportunities did not have jobs before their migration and were dependent upon their husbands or families. In such cases, the income that they had earned in their workplaces has changed their status as breadwinners in within their households, which in some cases has been invested to the migration of the male members in the families. Similarly, Arati's explanation on the impact of her migration suggests that migration has led unmarried women to become wage earner for their families, which has shifted the positions of daughters in the Nepali families. Due to patriarchal conceptions, sons have more obligations, expectations, and responsibilities towards their parents, while daughters are not expected to help the families economically. In contrast, employment opportunities abroad have provided daughters in their families to contribute economically in their families, which have shifted the positions of unmarried daughters from dependants to income providers. Out of 20 former migrant women interviewed, around 13 participants responded the economic benefits from their work; while 7 women did not benefit from their jobs. According to the focus group discussions, women who were able to receive "good" employers had advantages of earning income in the destinations and continue their works. In contrast, the other migrants were unpaid or received low wages, which were only sufficient to pay the loans they had taken before their migration.

Thus, the trend of feminization of migration has given Nepali women power and agency to transform the gender roles and hegemonic structures that existed within their families and societies. The notion of "power" in this context does not simply indicate the control over subjects or institutions; instead "power" here is formulated through controlling individual objectives and thinking of others (Lukes 1974 in Rashid, 2013: 886). Foucault, for instance, conceptualizes power as the capacity to create new ideas, relations, and discourses by implementing techniques and strategies, which spreads through societies and everyday discourse (Rashid, 2013: 886). On the other hand, the concept of "agency" is self motivation strategies, and the capacity to resist and reconstruct norms that exist in families, institutions or societies (Rashid, 2013: 887). In case of Nepali migrants, agency can be seen as the

migrant women's capacity to reconstruct the women's status and positions within the families, economy and societies.

Power and agency can thus be located in creating the conditions to support their families, reconstructing gender roles, and articulating autonomy to achieve their own desire for autonomy, freedom and interests. For instance, Meena and Sharada responded to the strategies and capabilities to reconstruct their status in their families and perceive new achievements, which indicate their power and agency.

In our society females were bound to household works then they go to their husband's home later. But this opportunity of migration has given women chance to escape from marriage too. It shows that women can also be independent and marry later when they want to. I personally did not want to get married that time. There were lot of proposals, but I chose to work. I always wanted to work, but I was afraid that I would not get any job since I did not complete my studies. Many men migrate for work. They come back and again go. They do not have to care about what the society will think about them. For women, it is more difficult to make decision. But now, women also do not care much about what others will think or say about them. (Meena)

It has made women independent and free from family burden. Before, I would stay at home and depend upon my husband. But when I went in Israel, my money was helpful for sending kids in good schools in the capital. Otherwise, alone with my husband's job, it would not have been possible. Working abroad also gives women more choices and freedom. You will gain confidence and no one in your family will down upon you. My mother in law used to complain a lot when I was living with them, but now even she calls me "Bahadur". But it was not easy to please her at first, but now she understands that what I did was beneficial for everyone in the family. (Sharada)

Here, Meena's and Sharada's responses indicate the agency in women to change the decisions in their families. Meena's individual decision of migration has not only made her gain experience, but also has helped her escape from marriage when she was not ready for it. Likewise, in case of Sharada, her contribution to the families has changed how her families see her. For instance, her mother in law calling her "*Bahadur*" indicates the transformation of her position. The term "*Bahadur*" in Nepali means brave which is generally associated with men for their heroic achievements. The association of such expressions connotes the changing impression of women's position in terms of honor within the families after the migration. Also, in the focus group discussions, the participants have expressed the achievement of self-esteem and empowerment that helped them to achieve further goals. For example, many of these women had not travelled to the capital of Nepal, but feel proud to have taken risks to achieve their goals. Similarly, many returnees have been able to invest

their income in small businesses such as grocery stores, beauty parlor, and tailoring. Likewise, discussion with key informants about the returnees inferred that many returned migrant women have adapted profession as auto-rickshaw drivers in Kathmandu, the profession which was pre-dominated by men. On the other hand, some women have been advocating on information about the destination countries and safe migration issues to those who come to seek for their advice.

However, stories like Meena and Sharada are not shared by every returnee migrants and thus, the experiences and income that migrant women gain cannot be generalized with everyone. Additionally, the impact of female migration on their positions in families cannot be always positive. For instance, I came across discussion about the cases where the women had to face difficulties after their return. For instance, Anju (40 years) stated that her husband got a second wife while she was away. Other women shared their experiences after returning as being stigmatized for the types of works done abroad and the activities that they may have not committed; such as accusation of having slept with their employers or other men. These are glimpse of problems that returnee migrants have to go through in their societies (which I have discussed in my discourse analysis). In such cases, the migration of women does not necessarily transform the cultural values and perception of the societies.

#### **4.4. Nepali Migrant Women Negotiating with Transnational Families**

Transnational practices involve the engagement of migrants on building relationships with their families through different networks such as mobile phones, internet, and transfer of money. As discussed in the literature review, the transnational practices that migrants engage in influence the lives of both, migrants and their transnational families. Transnationalism theory introduces the impact of transnational migration on those who are left behind (Sorensen and Guarnizo, 2007:157). However, transnational practices of the Nepali women migrant workers vary on the basis of their autonomy in their work which determines their ability to participate in transnational practices. On the basis of my findings, I analyze how Nepali migrant women participate in transnational practices with their families who are left behind. Also, I will discuss the emotional challenges that migrant women face while living in distance from their families and children.

Nepali migrant workers play an equivalent role similar to male migrants by sending remittances in the economic development and poverty alleviation of Nepal. According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2010/2011 report, the most remittances sending countries are from the Gulf region (49 percent) followed by India (19 percent) and Malaysia

(10 percent) (Sharma, Pandey, Pathak, and Sijapati-Basnet, 2014: 66). The female contribution to the remittances is quite low than that of the male migrants. For instance, NLSS 2010/2011 calculations states that the total remittances sent by the female migrants is 24.2%, while the male migrants send 75.8% (Sharma et.al, 2014:71). However, the remittances sent by the absent female migrant population have not been counted which suggests that the remittances sent by the absent population can increase the calculation. Also, the female migrants are said to have more tendency to save than among male migrant workers (Adhikari et. al, 2006 in Bhadra, 2007:14). According to the focus group discussion in my study, most of the female migrants work inside the households as domestic workers or care givers, they have little or almost no freedom to exit their workspaces which allow them to save their income. Among the participants, who received payment during their stay in the countries of destinations, women sent money to their parents or families through banks and money transfer service, in assistance with their employers. On the other hand, women in Israel send their money via an informal channel, called *Hundi*. *Hundi* is a traditional system of sending remittances in which migrants in destination countries give money to an agent, who in contact with other agents back in the host countries deliver the money sent by remitters to the recipients (Sijapati and Limbu, 2012: 17 in Sharma et.al, 2014:101). The remittances sent by migrants overall plays an important role in paying back loans, sending children in good schools, and raising the living standards of the transnational families.

Mobile communication remains the common means for communication with the families among the female migrants. According to the in-depth interviews, migrants who were fortunate to have good employers were allowed to call back home. However, the frequency of calling depended upon the facilities of mobile phone among the women. Women who were allowed to communicate with their families were able to call weekly, once in a month, once in two to three to six months or when permitted by their employers. In contrast, women in Israel and Malaysia were allowed to have their own mobile phones and communicate with their families on regular basis.

With no doubt, women who migrate for the economic benefits of their families suffer from homesickness and separation from their children. Mothering from a distance remains an emotional challenge both for mothers who migrate and children who are left behind. The pain of separation from the children creates feelings of being regretful and guilty for mothers. For instance, Muna, Meera and Sharada expressed,

I had a mobile phone and was allowed to talk when I was free. I was allowed to send money for my daughter too. So it was not that hard to



talk back home. I was left alone with an old lady at home and she used to like me a lot. She said she could feel my pain for leaving a small child at home. At times she used to scold me why I came leaving my child at home. At that time, I used to feel guilty and beat myself for the sins that I had committed. It was hard taking care of someone else while at home your child is waiting. My husband took care of her when I was away. I came back for my child. At least I was able to send her in good school. After I came back, my husband went to Saudi Arabia for work. (Muna)

When I was away it was hard to contact to my husband and families. Since my husband had to go out for work till late night, my daughter was raised by my mother. It was hard for me. I had to take care of children like that of my daughter's age who would pull out my hair and beat me constantly. If I shouted at them, they would complain to their parents and would not give me food to eat. It is hard even to remember. But, I always thought about daughter when I work, it would give me some motivations, thinking that at least I am doing something for her. Other than that there is not much progress in the family. Now my husband is thinking about going to Qatar. We do not know what has to come. I had spent all we had for my processing for Saudi. Now I am back to my stitching job. (Meera)

At first it was difficult for my children and families as I was away. My husband had to go for work, so I asked my mother to look after them. After some years, I sent them in boarding school in Kathmandu. I spent almost one whole year crying as I missed my sons a lot. I would worry if they were eating right or not. I never felt hungry or could not sleep at night that year. Many times I even thought about returning back. When I called home, I could not even talk with my kids. But, children got to go to good schools and I am happy for them . . . (Sharada)

Transnational migrants who are mothers in their households such as Muna, Meera, and Sharada struggle from the feeling of helplessness due to the distance between their children. Although they decide to migrate temporarily for the future of their children and families, they suffer from anxiety and guilt of living their children with their families. In the duration of separation, they learn to negotiate with these emotional strains. The migrant women's duties as domestic workers and caretakers continuously remind them of their children as they are engage in the similar works (assigned by their gender) in both their countries and destinations. However, the care that they provide for their children reflects love and kinship; while in their workplaces, care is given in return of monetary values.

Participants' responses suggest that migrant mothers cope up with the separation from their children by repressing their emotional stress and calling their children via phones. Also, they suggest that the migrant mothers try their best to become "good" mothers, for which,

they manage to work hard for the sake of their children. The separation between the mothers and children give the migrant women more hope to achieve better for the future of their children. As discussed in the characteristics of the participants, the Nepali migrant workers have either received primary or secondary level education or have not gone to schools. Thus, their vision for providing their children with better education remains the motivations for transnational mothers like Muna, Meera, and Sharada to continue their labor for the better future of their children.

While discussing about transnational families, the question arises, "Who takes care of the children while their mothers are away?" In my study, most families with mothers away from the children, the mothers negotiate who will take care of the children in her absence. Most of the mothers leave their children in care of their own mother while in some cases; husbands look after the children when they are unemployed. These comments clearly follow the traditional gender division of labor in Nepali families in which women play role as nurturers and men play roles of breadwinners. However, in case if men are unemployed, women take the decision for their children. The agency of migrant women in making the decision for their children again reflects their power in their families. The financial gains after the migration for instance, give the mothers opportunities to transform their gender roles by making decisions for their children and providing them with better education. Thus, traditional views about gender roles among the families still remain as the basic values; however, the migration of women has played an important role in shifting the paradigm in their families. Transnational parenting, in this case, transnational mothering plays an important role in influencing the lives of both female migrants and their transnational families with its base on gender division of labor and gender roles in their families and workspace.

#### **4.5. Discourse Analysis: Stigmatization of Migrant Women in their Societies**

This section explores the representation of migrant women in their societies on the basis of present discourse on Nepali women migrant workers and the experiences of the returnees through discourse analysis. Discourse can be understood as a group of ideas or modeled way of thinking which can be identified in textual or verbal communication, and can also be related to the social structures (Lupton 1992:145 in Powers, 2007:18). According to Cheek (1997),

discourse analysis provides insight into the functioning of bodies of knowledge in their specific situated contexts by generating interpretive claims

with regard to the power effects of a discourse on groups of people, without claims of generalizability to other contexts. (Powers, 2007:18)

This chapter draws on discourse analysis of newspaper articles on Nepali women migrants including interviews and focus group discussions conducted with former female migrants. The method of discourse analysis in one way enables us to see the impact of discourse on constructing perceptions of Nepali societies about women migrant workers. Consequently, comparing the perception of societies with the experiences of former female migrants shows how the discourses on female migrants influence the generalized representation of the migrant women workers in Nepali societies. Here, perception of societies is based on what Foucault (1980 in Saroca, 2013:410) calls subjugated knowledges:

... that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition . . .

The main purpose of this discourse analysis is to analyze the experiences of the former Nepali women migrants in their societies after returning from their migration journey from their own point of views. When I started my research study on feminization of migration in Nepal, the most challenging part was to reach the sample group of former migrant women for their participations in the study. I was aware of the challenges that I might face in the research study; therefore, I had developed my questionnaire on the basis of the impact of their migration on gender relations and transnational families. Acknowledging the fact that covering the emotional issues such as violence against migrants in the destination countries and trafficking of migrant women prevent these women to share those stories with an unknown person, I tried my best to focus only on their impact of migration. However, women were reluctant to take part in the story and did not want to share their experiences. Likewise, the contact with NGOs, working for the rights for migrant women, declined my proposal to have conversations with the returnees in their shelters because of the number of researches already being done by media and other researchers on migrant women as their subjects.

For instance, in Nepali media, Nepali migrant women are negatively represented which influences the stigmatization of these women by their families and societies (Bhadra, 2007:16). Nepali female migrants are generally depicted with stereotypes as 'victims' of abuse or being 'vulnerable', which I argue suppresses their agency. Such media portrayal makes these women create negative perception of all Nepali women migrants, even those who may share successful stories. The over representation of any subjects by media can have serious

implications on the societies and the migrant women themselves. Media dominates the sharing of information about any issues, with or without implication to any subject or reality; however McEvoy (1996) states that it is socially constructed (Saroca, 2013: 412). Thus, media can be considered as a powerful position of either enabling or constraining ideas, perceptions, identities, and social relations (Grossberg et al., 1990 in Saroca, 2013:412). Thus, the portrayal of female migrants by the Nepali media can constrain the societies from the positive impact of women's migration on their families and country, while reporting about their negative stories.

More importantly, the media stereotypes can have substantial social effects on the migrant women. As Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney (1998) argue that negative stereotypes can affect the self-esteem of the targeted subject/s and may often determine the behavior of other people towards them (Saroca, 2013:412). For instance, many Nepali migrant workers perceive their experiences during the migration process as the matter of shame for themselves and their families and thus become reluctant in sharing their experiences with others (Paoletti, et. al, 2014: 38). Thus, construction of women migrants on the behalf of their bitter experiences as 'victim' and 'vulnerable' can bring disgrace to those women and female migration discourse in the eyes of the societies.

In this discourse analysis, I have collected some articles that I came across during my field work on July/August 2014. For instance, the article "Women workers are doubly vulnerable" published on 6-12 June by *Nepali Times*, an English language weekly newspaper by Himalmedia Private Limited, depicts the story of Maya, a former migrant worker who "like many other innocent migrant workers ... ended up being brutalized and forced onto prostitution" (Adhikari, 2014). The article explains how Nepali women choose to migrate via irregular channels which "make them easy prey for ruthless recruiters, abusive employers and sexual predators". Likewise, the article synthesizes the perception from migration experts and government office to discuss their views on the situation of Nepali women migrants.

Other story about Nepali migrant that I came upon was in my field work, during the focus group discussion with the participants in the research. The discussion was about Nepali housemaid on trial upon the charge of murdering her employer's child in Saudi Arabia. In the focus group discussion, the participants discussed about the situation of the women and argued the oppression of the owners to be the potential cause for murdering the child. Few days later after my field work, I read news on her in the daily news paper which stated, "Saudi Arabia beheads housemaid" (*Republica*, August 2014). The Nepali woman was executed in charge of murder of the two-year-baby after she was found guilty. The story of

the woman as the subject of the discussion implies how news and information on women migrant issues flourish in the societies evoking subjective interpretation from the readers.

Nepali migrant women are portrayed by media as sexually exploited, trafficked, or cheated by the recruitment agencies. These stories resemble truth to some degree in relation to the situations of migrant women who travel through illegal channels. However, such representation of migrant women as "vulnerable", "innocent", "easy prey" may demean the status and agency of other migrant women who had actually benefitted by their migration and gained empowerment through their migration experiences. For instance, in the in-depth interview conducted with the former Nepali migrant women when I asked the participants about the perception of societies on them after their return, Rashmi and Kopila replied,

Society is still the same. When you decide to migrate, they tell you that it is dangerous for women to take such risks. And when you come back, they are eager to hear our stories. I have heard people backbiting about me. They suspect me to have slept with my employer, asked me whether or not I had horrible experiences. These things have all digested now. I know that I have not been to that situation. How can I shut others' mouth. (Rashmi)

People make guesses when women return from abroad. I have even heard people making up my stories. People hear this and that from news and they think everyone is raped. Even people suspect a 50 year old woman like me sleeping with other men. Sometimes I feel funny... (Kopila)

These responses from the in-depth interviews indicate the perception of societies on the returnees. The responses suggest that people tend to adapt knowledge from what they have seen and hear to talk about a discourse, which here is about migrant women. The experience of the participants as returnees depicts how the discourses about migrant women are based on what the media portrays. Women migrants are claimed to have "slept with employer" and been "raped" because the notion of women being "vulnerable" and "victim" are excessively portrayed in the societies. Thus, analyzing the article and the responses of the former migrants, it is important to acknowledge that media stereotypes about women have adverse affect on the lives of the Nepali female migrants which helps to understand the reluctance of migrant women to share their migration experience in the research.

## Chapter 5

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Nepali women migrant workers play an important role in the growth and development of the country's economy with remittances for which there are important as economic actors. Although Nepali women participating in transnational migration is a new concept, the trend of migrating for employment opportunities seems to be popular among Nepali women. The demand of female labor for domestic works in the Gulf nations was found to be the common factor facilitating the feminization of labor migration in the context of Nepal. The feminization of migration among Nepali women suggests the autonomy of women in mobility and transformation of gender relations that existed in traditional Nepali societies. By looking at the perceptions of the former migrant women, this research contributes to the understanding of how migration policies, intersection of gender and race shape their migration experiences. The findings of the study suggest that Nepali women supply their labor to the demand of domestic labor due to stereotypical constructions of the gender and race associated to them. Also, Nepali migrant women are challenged by the legal migration frameworks which enforce them to seek assistance of recruitment agencies and individual agents for crossing the border illegally.

Despite the risks and challenges that they might face during their migration process, Nepali women make their decision to migrate. Nepali women face sexual, physical, and mental harassment in their countries of destinations because of their status as migrant workers and the gendered migration policies that limit their access to immigrant rights and government assistance in the destinations. Since, the topic on Nepali women migrants has attracted many media and researchers for the study of the situation of migrant women, Nepali migrant who migrate are stigmatized in their societies and are perceived as victims of sexual exploitations and human rights abuse. So as not to repeat other studies on Nepali migrant women, this study addresses the abilities of Nepali female labor migrants to challenge the legal and social barriers that make them agents of their freedom of mobility. I argue that Nepali women's who make their autonomous decision to migrate are aware of the risks that they might have to face; however, they challenge the possible risks for the betterment of their families. Likewise, the findings of the study suggest that during their migration, women gain self-esteem, confidence, and courage after their migration and negotiate their roles as mothers, daughters, and housewives in their families at the same time. Additionally, the incomes they generate from their work have made these women shift their gender roles by being wage earner in their families, assisting their children in good schools and raising the living standard

of their families. Thus, if only the government could develop more transparent procedures and mechanism to provide support to Nepali migrant women in migration process and the destination countries, Nepali women would be recognized for their agency in contributing to the economy and development of the country.

Acknowledging that 'feminization of migration' is a broad topic, I accept the fact that this study does not cover every possible interpretation that comes under this topic. My recommendation for the further research on same topic would be to compare the migration of both male migrants and female migrants in order to measure their impact on gender relations and transnational families. Likewise, the other possible research could be in measuring the impact of feminization of labor migration on male migrants involved in domestic labor. The topic interests me because the participants in this study, who had worked in Israel, mentioned that Nepali men in Israel work in reproductive sector as domestic workers and caretakers. Thus, further inspection on the negotiation of gender roles by the Nepali male migrants in feminized labor can contribute in the gender and labor migration studies in the context of Nepal.

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**Appendix 1**

**Participant Consent Form**

Study title: Feminization of Labor Migration and its impact on Gender Relations and Transnational Families

Lead investigator: Pratibha Tandukar

**Declaration by participant:**

I have read, or have had read to me, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this study and understand that I can terminate my participation at any point during the study without any adverse consequences. I reserve the right to refuse to answer any question I do not want to answer.

I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to keep.

Participant's name:

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Declaration by member of research team:**

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it.

I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name:

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet**

**Title of Research Study:**

**The Feminization of Labor Migration in Nepal and its impact on  
Gender Relations and Transnational Families**

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study on the feminization of labor migration and its impact on gender relations and transnational families. Since it is important for the participants to understand the purpose of the study, you are requested to read the following information carefully. After reading the information, you may take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the study. Participation for this study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time during the research process.

The purpose of the study is to explore the affects of feminization of migration on gender relations and transnational families in the context of Nepal. The research is carried out in order to accomplish the undergraduate thesis requirement of the investigator.

The better insight on the impact of feminization of labour migration through the participants' perception and experience can help understand the framework structuring the on-going practice in relation to migration. Furthermore, the research will help comprehend the standpoint of the participants regarding feminization of migration and social values which may influence their opinion regarding gender relations maintained in their societies and families. Since the study related to the topic has been minimal, the proposed study can later be helpful in developing more significant ideas regarding the influence of female Nepali labour migrants in the country of their origin.

If you have any questions regarding the participation in this study, please contact

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Position: Undergraduate Student  
Address: Asian University for Women. Chittagong, Bangladesh.  
Bagbazar, Kathmandu  
Telephone number: +00801753380312, +9779841669082  
Contact: [pratibha.tandukar@auw.edu.bd](mailto:pratibha.tandukar@auw.edu.bd)

This is a qualitative research and includes two methodologies. They are: in-depth interviews and discourse analysis. In in-depth interview, the participants will be asked some open ended questions related to feminization of migration. The in-depth interview invokes in-depth response including individual experiences and opinions of migrants on the topic of the research. Next, the discourse analysis will be used in an attempt to examine the representation of affects of feminization migration through texts, images, and other discourse.

The time of the study generally depends upon the time taken by the participants in their interviews. Each individual interview is expected to last for an hour or two. The types of questions that will be asked in the interview are as follows:

- What are your thoughts on the topic regarding the feminization of labour migration in the context of Nepal?
- How does the feminization of labor migration shape gender relations in the country of origin as well as in countries of destination?
- How do Nepali female migrant workers engage in transnational practices?
- How feminization of migration has affected the lives of those who are left behind?

There are no known risks or side-effects for the participants in the study. However, the interviews require participants to contribute their valuable time. The participants' information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the thesis requirement. The information from the interview will be deleted from the researcher's database after the completion of the study. (No biological specimens will be collected during the research). Also, no names or information of the participants will be disclosed in the report of the study in order to maintain anonymity.

This research is important in the field of the study of migration since the feminization of migration (according to available literature) is changing the social construction by making impact on gender relations. Likewise, in case of Nepali female migrants, less study can be found regarding their contribution in society and families. Therefore, the findings from this research may help people to have better insight on the lives and experiences of female labour migrants and their impact in our society today.

After the completion of the study, the report will be reviewed by the advisor of the investigator and later will be handed over to the department of Asian Studies at Asian University for Women, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Likewise, a copy of report will be shared with participants who have contributed in the research (If they insist).

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study at any stage, please contact:

Name, position: Professor Sangita Rayamajhi, Research Advisor  
 Address: Asian University for Women  
 20/A. M.M. Ali Road,  
 Chittagong 4000, Bangladesh  
 Email: [sangita.rayamajhi@auw.edu.bd](mailto:sangita.rayamajhi@auw.edu.bd)

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been designed or conducted and wish to contact someone else at the Asian University for Women, please email the AUW Institutional Review Board (AUWIRB) through the following information:

Name, position: Dr. Sara N. Amin, Chair of the AUWIRB  
 Address: 20H 501, Asian University for Women, 20A MM Ali Road  
 Telephone number: +880-31-2854980  
 Email: [irb@auw.edu.bd](mailto:irb@auw.edu.bd)