

# Role of Remittance in Gender Transformation- A Study of Women Labor Migration in Pokhara Metropolitan City

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## Abstract

*The power, authority, and empowerment attained with the aid of economic capitals not only aids in the transformation of gender roles, but social and cultural capital also facilitates various facets of life, including: the standard of education, the types of employment involvement, the level of awareness, the types of family living, and the modes of interaction. As a result, both benefits and drawbacks can be found in the daily lives of both migrants and non-migrants due to the growing trend of female labor migration. In a traditionally patriarchal nation like Nepal, the migration of women for labor raises moral concerns about their moral decency as they struggle to reintegrate into their families and communities. The gender shift in the slum community of Pokhara Metropolitan City, Nepal, is the main emphasis of this paper's examination of the various features of remittances and ways through which they are transferred. Particular focus is placed on the conversion of economic capital into social and cultural capital as well as the function of proxy managers in managing household duties and remittances. Data from both secondary literature and original sources are used to support the arguments made here. The data came from 199 households of women migrants' families who had moved away at least three years prior to the survey, which was conducted between March and July 2022. The data collecting and analysis techniques used were both quantitative and qualitative. The numerous facets of remittances are examined in this paper. The findings explain the diverse forms of capital accumulation and how women gain more influence in various spheres of social life. The study also offers a more nuanced view of how women are becoming more involved in household decision-making as a result of economic empowerment and how to address forthcoming socio-cultural barriers that prevent their engagement in public sphere.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, Remittances, Gender, Households transitions.*

## Introduction

There are arguably more people moving around than ever before. The emphasis on the economic, social, educational, and symbolic forms of capital has returned to the countries as a result of the global upsurge and migration of people between the nations. Currently, about 3.4% of the world's population (or 258 million individuals) reside in a nation other than their place of origin (IOM, 2020). They support them by sending money and other remittances as well as by selling their physical and intellectual labor to the host country. Migrants frequently maintain strong contact with their relatives back in their place of origin. In the sense that immigration serves as a catalyst for releasing both workers and their families. An estimated USD 432 billion of the USD 592 billion in worldwide remittances that year

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went to underdeveloped nations. This is more than three times as much as the 132 billion dollars in official development assistance (ODA) and more than half of the 764 billion dollars in foreign direct investment (FDI) that poor nations got in 2015. Therefore, migration has played a crucial role in both population change and the diversification of livelihoods in many developing nations for at least the past century (Agesa & Agesa, 1999).

Due to violent conflict in the home nation and global economic, political, and cultural development, migration patterns have persisted throughout history in various forms. Castles & Miller identify several tendencies regarding migration in their book, "The Age of Migration." First, as more nations participate in migratory movements, one can speak about the globalization of migration. Second, while movement speeds are accelerating, migration is also accelerating. Third, various people migrate for different reasons, which makes migration different. The fourth is the feminization of migration, which has increased the number of women who migrate for economic reasons. Fifth, the migration issue is becoming more politicized as governments work more to control migration flows by implementing laws (Castles and Miller, 2003).

Thus, both men and women play a significant role in international migration. A conversation about gender and gender roles in the new paradigm is being opened by an increasing number of female migrants living alongside male migrants. Thus, migration has changed the traditional roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women over a long period of time. Where there is little to no gender discrimination, women are viewed as taking on male tasks and responsibilities with ease. Additionally, during the absence of their counterparts, these women appear to relish their freedom and improved access to and control over home resources (Acosta, 2006). Such adjustments may eventually lessen the gender wage gap and contribute to a reduction in gender inequality. However, in cultures with stricter gender norms and without a partner, women's actions are the subject of social scrutiny. In order to maintain their reputation as "nice spouses," women may seek to reduce their appearances in public (McEvoy et al., 2012). In Nepalese society, women fall into the second category, where they are watched over by everyone when their husbands are away. Today, however, this trend is reversing, and women are free to relocate and conduct household tasks as well as outside activities without difficulty (Chaudhary, 2015). This study has concentrated on the evolving gender practices where female migration has opened new bundles of opportunities through the intrusion of remittances in understanding the impacts of remittances on gender transformation. Firstly, the change in breadwinner power in a household's structure has been seen with women's migration. Secondly, migrants tend to keep close contact with their families, and thus, ideas and culture flow across borders through different means of communication. The social and cultural capital gained in transnational space doesn't only reduce gender discrimination practices but also helps in the women's empowerment process. So, the overall objectives of the study are to analyze and explain the role of different forms of capital in gender practices in transnational space. To meet the objective of the study, the analysis is based on the women's labor migration and remittances sent by them back to their families left behind in the country. Before turning to the analysis, I first discuss the analytical framework for understanding the remittances and its different form and way through which it helps in gender transformation.

## **The Resilience of Remittances in Gender Practices:**

In this section, I go through how various remittances can help and have an effect on gender change in conventional home systems. Since both groups participate in processes of economic, cultural, political, and social interaction, the connections between movers and non-movers are particularly significant in the global environment (Markley 2011). The transportation of goods, cash, ideas, and skills to friends and family back home is thereby facilitated by migrants. Levitt (1998) asserts that immigrants are remitting both social and financial support to their native countries. These exchanges take place when migrants travel to or live in their hometowns and communicate with one another through letters, videos, cassettes, emails, blogs, and phone calls, as well as when visitors from outside the receiving country pay visits to migrants in those countries (Levitt 2001). Remittances go beyond money transfers and show that migrants are sending a range of goods at simultaneously, therefore Markley (2011) contends that they should be studied separately from other issues and without consideration of the context. Levitt and Lamba (2010) assert that the migrant's experiences in their home countries have a substantial impact on how they assimilate into the new community, which has an impact on the amount of money they ultimately send back home. In order to build the new paradigm of gender creation in transnational space, I position remittance (economic and social) actions as one of the tools.

Capital can manifest in one of three ways, depending on the field in which it operates and the cost of the more or less expensive transformations that are necessary for its effectiveness in that field: as economic capital, which is instantly and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible into economic capital under certain conditions and may also be institutionalized; or as human capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into economic capital and may be institutionalized. Therefore, a person who travels worldwide is involved in the sending of remittances for both social and economic reasons. For instance, rather than long-term capital investments in homes and land, economic remittances to poor countries like Nepal are typically utilized to pay household needs, the education of close relatives, and agricultural costs (Bohara-Mishra, 2013). Similar to this, Thiemes and Wyss (2005) explain that the main effects of migration include improved social capital, children's education, knowledge related to migration, and higher financial capital. It highlights the fact that a sizeable portion of the economic remittances sent home by migrant workers is utilized to pay for children's education. Therefore, as migrant workers donate money to support their children's education, migration has a big impact on education. The deep family, religious, and political relationships between migrants and the families they left behind are explored in the ethnographic study conducted by Levitt (2001) between Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood in Boston, and Miraflores, a community in the Dominican Republic. Levitt asserts that migration caused a rift between those who migrated and their kids. She argues that while other kids have nicer clothing, fancier book bags, and a full set of school supplies, some youngsters lack the uniform or equipment necessary to play the game (Levitt 2001; 85). In this specific case, migration can result in increased educational funding, allowing families to keep their children in school longer than children from non-migrant families.

Levitt provides an in-depth analysis of how transnational migration affects everyone, including those who stay behind, challenges migrants' views of race and gender, and upends family and professional life. In addition to bringing money back home, migrants also bring thoughts and actions that inspire the women they leave behind to think outside the home, partake in extracurricular activities, and establish connections with social services, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Levitt investigates the notion that men and women behave equally while making decisions and handling domestic chores once the wife leaves the home (Levitt 2001; 61). She also discusses how women who were younger, single, had higher earnings, and had more independence from their husbands were more receptive to novel concepts and ways of acting. Therefore, social and economic remittances have an equal impact on the daily lives of migrants and non-migrants, affecting their behavior, attitudes, and values in the global context. As a result, the influence of remittances received by female migrants alters not only traditional gender roles but also the way that households are managed, leaving a gap that has been filled by families who stayed behind.

### **Methodology and Study Site:**

The research was carried out in Pokhara Metropolitan City, Gandaki Province, for a total of five months in 2022, from March to July. Pokhara Metropolitan City had a total population of 457,792 as per the Central Bureau of Statistics' (CBS) 2021 census, making it one of the metropolitan cities with the greatest population. Due to its ample room for expansion in all areas, including facilities for education, health, employment, a serene climate, and numerous other areas, the city has turned into a hub for internal migrants. Therefore, the current study focused on internal migrants, or persons who had moved in Pokhara city, especially in slum community 35 to 40 years ago in quest of better chances. However, due to poverty, unskilled work, illiteracy, language barriers, caste concerns, and other factors, the desire to live in a high level of living in the city does not fully satisfy their ambitions. As a result, they were shut out of the city's social, cultural, economic, and political life and turned to alternative options to make life easier. Therefore, the community chose foreign migration as a solution to its daily issues. The current study has concentrated on the female labor migration and the remittances accumulated that helps in gender transition. The snowball chain method was used to find qualified respondents whose female family members had left at least three years prior to the study's execution. I questioned each migrant's family to see if they could name anyone in the neighborhood who fit the study's criteria. To answer the research issue, data were gathered using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The female migrant households from the slum neighborhood were not mentioned in any official records kept by the government. So, the equation proposed by Cochran (1963: p. 75) in unidentifiable sample has been used here for the computation of sample size. 196 is the predicted size of the indefinite sample for the study area according to the Cochran formulas. About 12 non-respondent respondents who didn't want to participate and answer the research questions were located at the field location, thus I eliminated all of those samples. However, I had specifically chosen 199 families that contained people from various cultural backgrounds, as well as people who had lived in Pokhara for the previous ten years and had varying socioeconomic features. 48 in-depth interviews with migrant wives' husbands were undertaken in addition to the survey study of

125 migrant households to determine household characteristics in terms of demographics, migration, assets, and livelihood activities. The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to examine how husbands dealt with negotiating their gender roles and relationships in light of the impact that the wives' migration had on their marriages. 15 case studies of returnee women migrants were chosen in order to learn more about their recent job experiences and daily lives. 11 migrant children (aged 20 to 30) were included because they would be able to elaborate further on how their father negotiated the role of parent in the absence of the mother. Five focus group discussions (FGDs) with members of the community were held to learn the causes of the rising trend of women migration in their community and to talk about the shifting trends in the breadwinner position and power in households. Each and every piece of statistical data has been prepared, examined, presented in tables, and interpreted in a descriptive way. The responses were transcribed using certain catchy words for the manual thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

## Discussion

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents:

In this section, I will discuss the demographic characteristics of women such as: age, education, religion, caste, and marital status are discussed. Though the government of Nepal hasn't totally banned the women labor migration but change its policy about the age limitation of women migration to 24 who intend to go for Gulf and other countries for work and for mothers, their children must be over two years of age.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of women migrants.*

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age group	Less than 24	39	19.8
	25 to 35	92	46.2
	35 to 45	45	22.6
	More than 45	21	10.6
	Total	199	100

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Education	Illiterate	33	16.8
	Formal	17	8.5
	Primary level	44	22.3
	Secondary level	36	18.1
	Higher Secondary	31	15.7
	Others	38	19.1
	Total	197	100
Religion	Hindu	147	73.9
	Buddhist	19	9.5
	Christian	22	11.1
	Other	11	5.5
	Total	199	100
Ethnicity	Brahmin	8	4
	Chhetri	13	6.5
	Newar	6	3
	Gurung	41	20.6
	Magar	14	7
	Dalit	117	58.8
	Total	199	100
Marital status	Single	16	8
	Arrange marriage	43	21.6
	Love marriage	62	31.2
	Separated	18	9
	Widowed	7	3.5
	Unmarried	44	22.1
	Divorce	9	4.5
	Total	199	100

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Source: Field Survey, 2022

The study found that most of the women migrant's workers were in between the age of 25 to 35 years, 46.2% and only about 10.6% migrant's age were above 45 years. Though, the government policy clearly indicated that the female who intend to migrate for work to abroad must more than 24 years but in the field site, about 19.8% of the women migrant's workers were below 24 years. The intensive in-depth interview with family members stated that, some of migrants went for visit visa whereas other go through Delhi Airport. Regarding the education qualification, about 22.3% of the migrants attend primary level of education, whereas 8.5% attend formal education and 19.1 attend more than higher education. In addition to that, 73.9% of the migrants follow Hindu religion, whereas 11.1% were Christian and 5.5% follow Bon religion. The ethnic composition of migrants is very notable that shows, about 58.8% of migrants belong from Dalit community that is followed by Gurung 20.6% and only 4% from the Brahmin community. The reasons behind this is the slum community has mostly occupied by Dalit people and due to low education, lack of skills and caste these people were not getting proper wages after work and so choose migration as an option to meet their basic needs. Considering the marital status of migrants, about 31.2% of women did love marriage, followed by 21.6% did arrange marriage. It is interesting to note that, 22.1% migrants were unmarried and 8% single whereas 3.5% were widowed and 9% of the migrants were separated.

### **The role of proxy manager in management of remittance:**

The gendered norms of household provisioning that are prevalent in a certain community influence migrants' preferences for receiving remittances from a particular family, at least in part, as well as the role that these norms play in influencing migrants' choices for how remittances are spent. The women migrants preferred to send remittances to other responsible family members who don't mishandle the money because household responsibilities, such as child rearing, education, health care, family care, food, and clothing for family members, are all solved through remittances. The time of their home visits, the proximity of role substitution, and the migrants' own self-decision all play a role in the ability of women migrants to confirm that their remittances are utilized as intended. For instance, female migrants who are single or divorced are more likely to send money to their mothers. As the family's proxy manager, the mother has more say in how remittances are distributed. Migrants are aware that their only real avenue for influencing how their remittances are spent is their proxy manager—those who are beholden to the same rules and whose choices about how to utilize their funds are most likely to reflect their own preferences.

Women migrants want to make sure that their preferences for sending remittances to their mothers or other women in the household are respected, as these people carry out all gender-based roles and responsibilities and offer suitable childcare. However, these women desire to guarantee that the remittances are utilized effectively. According to research on intra-household spending patterns (Quisumbing and Maluccio 2000), the distribution of resources is influenced by the bargaining power of each household member. This literature has consistently demonstrated, in instance, that household spending on children's education, health, and nutrition rises in direct proportion to the amount of resources under the control of women (Quisumbing and Maluccio 2000). Migrant women want to make sure that their choices are respected when sending money back to the home. During an in-depth discussion



with a 46-year-old guy whose wife had spent the previous seven years in Bahrain revealed the following:

My wife sends money to her mother as I and my children are living in my in-laws' house. My wife moved to Bahrain six years ago, leaving our two children with me, and after she moved, I came to live with my in-laws because I don't know how to care for children and due to my own work pressure. My wife frequently sends money to her mother and I don't have any objections as she become breadwinner to run our families. My mother-in-law carry all the housekeeping expenses, including the children's schooling and health. I found myself lucky that she is more responsible than me to look after my two children and serve food on time before we leave for work and school. (Ram Thapa, 46 years)

In response to a question regarding the method of remittance transfer, the respondents stated that migrants send them money via IME for things like home expenses, healthcare costs, and child care. Sending money to the mother is secure for the correct use of remittances because the majority of migrants are unmarried, single, divorced, or separated and living with their parents. It has also been discovered that the mother serves as both the family's proxy manager and manager in general. The gender ideology and gendered norms of household provisioning that place the major responsibility for household provision and child care on women have a significant impact on the remittance behavior of female migrants. In their role as proxy managers, women not only handle domestic duties but also childcare and save money for future security. The disparities in preferences between male and female migrants regarding the usage of their remittances are shaped by these gendered norms of household provisioning, which also have an impact on the migrants' choices regarding the recipients of their remittances.

As a result, the female labor migration not only highlights the financial difficulties women experience in their native countries, but also provides them with a new avenue for economic advancement. Even though their families didn't want to send them away, social and economic pressures surrounded those reasons for seeking out better prospects in life. But because they had no other sources of assistance, they were forced to struggle through the irregular remittance flow. Thus, in traditional patriarchal countries like Nepal where women were still able to make decisions based on social structure, the shifting gender norms and values associated with the roles and duties allocated to men and women offer a new paradigm of gender debate. In such a situation, economic remittances received from a distant country not only improve the social and cultural standing of migrant women, but also those women who are left behind and frequently serve as proxy managers due to access to remittances. With the aid of remittances, they typically decide to provide quality education, seek out medical services, and celebrate festivals and this is a way of transforming the economic capital to social, cultural and symbolic capital.

### **Impacts of Socio-cultural capital on gender transformation:**

The connections between migrants and their families left behind are so strong in transnational space because migrants send not only economic capital but also a dual



exchange of social-cultural and symbolic capital through various modes of communication. When migrants are engaged in the transfer of money or goods, in the meantime they provide instruction with the ideas and knowledge they have accumulated towards the overall management of households. Levitt (1998) asserts that migrants are transferring not only economic but also social remittances. She defines the term "social remittance" as the diffusion of social norms, practices, and social capital toward and from migrants' sending countries. These kinds of remittance processes take place when migrants visit or live in their hometown and through other means of communication such as letters, videos, cassettes, emails, blog posts, and telephone calls, or when non-migrants visit those in receiving countries (Levitt 2001). Not only are migrants instructing their families left behind, but at the same time, migrants' habits have also had strong influences on their way of living in the new diaspora.

During the interviews, the women were asked if their gender behavior had changed as a result of their migration. In most of the interviews, the interviewees admitted that they had seen intense and different changes in the role-taking behavior of males and females, as female labor migration empowers women as breadwinner members of the entire family, regardless of how much they are earning. In an interview, a 48-year-old man whose wife had moved to Kuwait before the age of seven stated:

My wife had migrated to Kuwait when I got into a road accident and was unable to take care of the family's responsibilities. She plays the role of father to my children and husband to me. She frequently sent remittances to my account. During phone conversations, I always ask her to take food on time and care for herself in an unknown place. The children are also happy after having a visual conversation with their mother, as she always instructs them to have up-to-date knowledge and learn skill-based work so that it will be easier for them to migrate to a better country. (Suman Chhetri, 48 years old, migrant husband.)

The above case study shows that economic remittances don't remain in a single form as they transform into a symbolic form of capital as migrants spend money to educate their children and family members. Thus, migration plays a dominant role in the schooling of the children, as the money sent by migrants is used for educational purposes. Additionally, migrant children have better clothes, fancier book bags, and a whole set of school supplies than their friends. During an informal conversation with a student reading in class seven at a recognized boarding school, she stated that she considers herself fortunate to have her mother, who always asks for everything she needs for school and also provides money for school tiffin, which most of her classmates do not. These female migrants maintain constant contact with their families, with whom they discuss ongoing household activities and the activities of their children.

During the fieldwork too, most of the respondents stated that the use of different types of social media lessens the distance between migrants and them. Migrants share their everyday life activities and the new ideas and knowledge they gain with their families. The cheaper means of communication make it easier for them to share each and every activity that further affects their behavior, attitudes, and values across the transnational space.

An interviewee with a 36-year-old migrant sister who lives with her parents and

brother describes how her youngest sister moved to Malta three years ago and is now waiting for visas as well. She stated that:

"Three years ago, my sister went to Malta and worked as a housekeeper in a hotel. She said that the work is good and easy for her, so if I wanted to come there, I would apply for visas. Firstly, my mother doesn't agree with my migration, but my sister convinced her about our security and good health in Malta during our conversation. We see my sister's room and work place through Facebook Messenger, and she assures us about everything in her new place. She was so elegant, and she proposed to my mother that if I should migrate there, we both would earn more and buy land in Pokhara. "And you know I applied for visas and am now waiting for my flights over Malta," says Dolma Sherpa, a migrant sister, 36.

The case doesn't just highlight interpersonal behavior; it also explains the changing norms and values attached to gender roles during the migration process, where families left behind especially, the husband are performing households chores and wives are engaged in breadwinner role. And in doing so, both migrants and non-migrants are sharing their roles to run the families and maintain stability and cohesion within them. Through the use of social media the physical distance between them become loosen and the mutual bond of trust and loyalty become stronger through the communication. About 85.4% of the respondents—responded that the use of social media such as Viber, Facebook Messenger, E-mail, and WhatsApp makes their communication easy and the interesting part is only 10.6% use telephone to communicate. The most notable thing is that, the transfer of social and cultural capital during the conversation ease migrants and non-migrants and build the familial relationship in peaceful way. Furthermore, the returnee women migrants carried new values, norms, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes in home country and these women were engaged in some type of income generation activities. During an in-depth interview with a returnee who spent almost 21 years of her life in three countries and has opened a grocery store and a tailor shop in her community, she shared her experience like this:

*After returning, I was in a dilemma about what to do with the rest of my returnee life as my parents had already died and I was still single. There was no single reason for me to stay, but my age limits don't allow for foreign migration. Then I decided to do something productive with my time. Then the experiences I acquired while working in different countries inspired me to do some independent business rather than work for others. And you know, I opened this grocery and tailor with an investment of Rs. 6 lakh. Now, I am earning money, and this is sustainability that I never achieved during my migration process. Every month, I save some amount of money in community-owned cooperatives. (Bishnu Maya B.K., 51 years, returnee migrant)*

Another respondents named Sita Nepali about forties years old and spent nearly 24 years of her life in various countries is still in a state of economic insecurity. The good rapport with Sita opened a series of discussions about the impacts of migration on women migrants' lives. She spent all her life earning for the education of her siblings, who have now become

nurses and soldiers in government jobs. This is one of the benefits of her remittance earnings, but she is still in dilemma whether to stay in Nepal or again move to foreign. She knew she could independently open a small hotel by using her skills and knowledge gained in a foreign nation, but at the same time, insecurity in Nepal's economy and the lower profit margins here don't let her do so.

The impacts of social remittances along with economic capital don't only transform the gender roles of women from housekeeping to breadwinners of the family, but at the same time, the proxy manager in the home country utilizes the economic capital to transform into socio-cultural and symbolic capital with a proper consultation of migrants through the different uses of communication. Social remittances may cause social change in the lives of both migrants and non-migrants in terms of gender transformation, but the current study found that women benefited more from it in terms of empowerment and decision-making because they play a key dominant role as breadwinners of the families.

## **Conclusion**

It is often believed that women play an active part in societal transformation. When women took the role of breadwinners by entering in transnational labor migration, the patriarchal mode of traditional society has been changed due to intrusion of economic as well other form of social and symbolic capital. Remittance senders and recipients have the potential to transform gendered power dynamics through enhancing the economic standing, participation, and decision-making of women. This paper has investigated how women migration changes the traditional gender roles and assists in remittances accumulation. Women who migrate may take on a new role as the family's major breadwinner as remittance senders, and women who stay behind may take on greater responsibility and gain more autonomy in managing household resources and assuming traditionally male duties in the society. And when women exercise significant control over how remittances are used, they are typically used to support the dietary, educational, and medical requirements of family members, particularly children. Furthermore, the men, especially the husband who stay behind may take the role of house-band i.e. more responsible to carry out both households and outside activities in absence of their wives. The paper has also revealed the changing practices of gender roles and responsibilities due to high dependence on remittances by the family. In a developing country like Nepal, remittances become main sources of survival and for the daily expenditure to the migrants family so, the family doesn't have objection towards changing power and position both inside as well as outside house. The changing status of women i.e., from housewives to breadwinner increases their pride, worthiness and respect among the family. Though remittances may play a role in changing how women are viewed in society but the still, the sociocultural elements like education, religion, and women's public space participation are major dominant elements in gender transformation. Thus, economic remittances can be the main source of income for recipient households, which doesn't only helps to better their financial status but also uplift the social-cultural position of migrants and non-migrants.

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