

Repercussions of Emigration on Left behind Family Members: A Study of Sangrur District of Punjab



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Abstract

The research has been carried out to understand the outcomes of international migration on the left behind family members. The below mentioned theoretical data shows that migration process effects people in country of destination as well as in country of origin. Giddens and Bhawra (2013) have discussed about many push and pull factors attached to the process of international migration. Left behind women, children and elderly parents have to face many social taboos in the absence of their emigrated relative. Desai and Banerji (2018) opined that the qualitative research should be conducted regarding the women whose husbands have migrated to foreign lands by leaving them behind. So, an attempt will be done to get the knowledge of challenges and problems of left behind women.

Keywords: International Migration Left behind Women, Problems, Challenges, Abroad, Phenomenology, Life World, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

Migration is the process of flow of people from one region to another. It comes out as the effect of global integration and globalization. During this process, several changes take place like demographic, economic and social. Migration has two aspects-internal and external. Migration is an important factor that brings exorbitant changes among the lives of the people involved. Migration and its consequences have mattered enough for the geographers, historians and social researchers in the past and continue to matter today as well. According to Castles, Haas and Miller, authors of *The Age of Migration*: 'There can be few people in either industrialized or less developed countries today who do not have personal experience of migration and its effects; this universal experience has become the hallmark of the age of migration.' (Koser 2016:5)

Though in the present globalized world, migration - both out-migration and in-migration, has emerged as a concomitant of development, but the Sociologists have attempted to analyze development in terms of its positive as well as the negative impacts on the society as well as the individual. Only 3 per cent of the world's population comprises that of international migrants, but the effects of migration are much more pronounced on the people who are left behind compared to those who migrate (Koser 2016). In Malwa region of Punjab, international migration is increasing on a fast pace, where everybody wants to settle in foreign country to get better standards of life. It effects both who left their homeland and others who are left behind. According to Gurmeet Singh Sidhu, 'Without any authentic, accurate and reliable study, there is a general conception about the migration that it enriches the specific society.' (Singh 2007) There is need to do more research on migration processes in Punjab and its consequences.

'Dynamics of International Out-Migration from Punjab'(2015) by Aswini Nanda, project coordinator at the Centre for Research on Rural and Industrial Development' Chandigarh and INED Paris coordinator Jacques Veron state that out of 133 villages that they selected for their study, only one village was like this who did not have any relative living abroad. Reasons can be many like increasing employment opportunities, providing better standards of living to the next generation, sending remittances to the family behind and to show off their affluent lifestyles in front of kinship or community. (Veron and Nanda 2015)

History of Migration

The human migration started with the origin of human race in Rift

Valley in Africa when 1.5 million and 500 BC Homo erectus and Homo sapiens advanced to Europe and then into other continents. In the ancient times, Roman expansion and Greek colonization was dependent on migration and apart from Europe many important movements were related to Mesopotamian, Indus, Inca and Zhou empires. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there was the forced migration of the slaves. Approximately 12 million people were forced to migrate from western Africa to the New World and around the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean; migration in lesser numbers took place. After the breakdown of period of slavery, the indentured labor started migrating from India, China and Japan in large numbers. Nearly 1.5 million labor from India migrated to other parts of the world specifically Europe where they started working in fields. (Koser 2016)

In Punjab, international migration started from Doaba region and since 1880s people of Punjab are migrating to the foreign lands for the greener pastures. There are many pull and push factors which are reasonable for this phenomenon. Though India is developing but still people move out due to many reasons. There are push factors like lack of employment generation, shrinking interest of youth in agriculture and backwardness of the society in comparison to the developed countries. Pull factors are better economic opportunities, modern societies, good education and health facilities (Bhawra 2013). The famous author and former director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, Giddens (2013) mentioned some of the push factors like political oppression and population pressures.

The family migration was started after World War II and after 1960s people of Punjab started migrating to North America and United Kingdom in search of better economic opportunities, more social networks and better standards of living and to look after their families left behind in Punjab by sending remittances. These countries support easy immigration policies and provide citizenships because of what international migration is increasing in Punjab. As a fundamental part of society, women are central to any discussion of the causes and consequences of international migration. (Singh 2007)

Review of Literature

The International Dialogue on Migration (2014) which was held by International Organization for Migration states that migration acts as a medium to improve standards of living of migrants as well as their family members especially in the form of economic advantages. But, in the present era, migration extends serious challenges to migrants and their left behind family members; these can be the problems of separation of family members with the migrants, socio-psychological difficulties, problems in developing relations with other relatives and other members of the society. Wives are forced to stay with in-laws in absence of the husbands and left with no other choice except longing for their partners. In many cases of migrant couples, children are left behind by their parents due to rigid migration policies of different countries of destination.

International migration has consequences on

the everyday lives of the persons involved in the phenomenon. Left behind wives meet many challenges. The number of left behind family members is not known globally. The relationships and family structures change with the effect of migration. There is some estimate about the international migrants but the unknown fact is that there is no particular data of how many family members migrate with the migrant and how many are left behind (Ullah 2017). The impact of international migration on the left behind family members is the topic of debate for many years.

Some studies related to migration of husbands and left behind wives have revealed that the consequences can be both-positive and negative. The migration brings out the inner strengths of the left behind women with which they have never familiar. They become more autonomous, independent and decision makers in the absence of their husbands. They start interacting more with other people, organizations, community members and friends, which at somewhere helps such women to get out of their tensions and insecurities. Many thinkers have talked about the importance of studies regarding problems of women and solutions. According to Ullah (2004), 'Women's empowerment is a major concern in the developing world and is emerging as an important indicator of the development of a society as well as the status of women.'

As described by the expert of international migration studies Khalid Koser (2016) phenomenon of International Migration is a large scale structure. It poses many challenges on the global level as well as on the local level. Global level issues are migration and security for example the case of 9/11 which has shown the connection between migration and terrorism, unfamiliarity between migrants and culture of country of destination and problems of increasing irregular migration. On the local level, in the country of origin, international migration has important implications on the people left behind by the emigrants to settle abroad. Many challenges are faced by the remaining people; they can be the parents, children or wives of the emigrants.

The research carried out by Moraes (2015) has shown the plight of the left behind women in Goa due to the migration of their husbands. She has collected the life histories and taken interviews of such women in order to get extensive knowledge of their issues and challenges. She has adopted a qualitative approach because according to her it is the best method to collect the brief account of lived experiences of the respondents.

To discover the subjectivities of the effected women, phenomenological approach is followed by many researchers in different fields. The interpretative phenomenological research by Baird and Mitchell (2014) shows that women are needed to be taken as 'multilayered', the deeper understanding of which is only possible through a qualitative research. When a researcher carries out research on women issues and challenges, women feel empowered by the fortuity which makes them talk about their experiences as well as knowing that their experiences are given

values and are believed.

Gartaula (2012) studied the objective and subjective well beings of the women who are left behind by their migrated husbands. It is not necessary that if the objective development has happened on the parts of left behind due to the remittances sent by the emigrants; it will lead to the overall development of the remained ones rather 'the subjective experiences are rather complex, multifaceted and context specific depending on the family situation, socio-cultural disposition and prior economic situation of the actors involved.'

To understand the importance of phenomenological approach to study women's issues, the research done by Powel and Kennedy (2010) opined that phenomenology is the study about the phenomena, how people perceive, react, and face the phenomena and the noticeable aspects in the lives of people in context of the particular phenomena. With the help of a phenomenological approach, women's lives can be explored and explained. This approach helps the researcher to keenly listen to the views of respondents' life world and the complexities of the lives can be understood.

Desai and Banerji (2005) in their paper on male migration and left behind wives in India examine two aspects of women's lives, one is their autonomy and the other is their participation in labor force. The household structures play an important part. Women who stay in joint families have more responsibilities, less autonomy and control over their lives in comparison to the women who do not stay in joint families.

Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (2004) maintains that migration process effects both-migrant and the family members left behind. Women remained behind encounter many problems while staying with other relatives who may effect and restrain their activities outside and inside the home. Such women must undertake some income-generated activities to overcome or compensate for the losses they face because of the migration of the closed family members and such activities also bring autonomy and decision making power to the women left behind. It is significant to understand the process of international migration from a viewpoint of emigrants and the people related to them. The outcomes and consequences of the phenomenon shape the experiences of the migrants and the left behind members of the family, whether male or female.

The research by Gulati (1987) on male migration and its socio-economic impacts on left behind women demonstrates that initially male migration brings stress and strain in the lives of left behind women; they may be migrant's mother, wife, unmarried sisters and daughters. They develop a special need to maintain networks with relatives and friends. But gradually there comes a noticeable positive change in their lives regarding coping efficiently with different situations, household chores, income generation and loneliness.

The report prepared by Anuradha Nagaraj in

2016 throws light upon the condition of women left behind by their husbands who have migrated to the Gulf countries. Such women face many social and psychological problems like loneliness, anxiety, avoiding social functions and decreasing bond with their parents and in-laws. The reports also reveals an estimate number of people who have migrated to the six Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman that is around six million.

Sonalde Desai and Manjishtha Banerji 2018 enquired into the lives of women left behind by their migrated husbands by using data of Human Development Survey 2005. This survey poured light on the positive and negative outcomes of international migration that this phenomena has positive impacts on those left behind women who do not live in joint families and enjoy autarchy but those who stay in joint families have less say in their in-laws house, suffer from many household problems and possess no decision making power.

Maria C. Marchetti (2012) has discussed about the problems of left behind individuals whose families and friends have immigrated to foreign countries. International emigration is not an individual phenomenon in fact its consequences can be felt much more on the remaining individuals. The disjunction and separation between social networks is the long faced problem. She has described, "When people emigrate, people are physically absent, but are still psychologically present-the ones left behind in the lives of those emigrating and the emigrants in the lives of those staying behind."

The report by Times of India has given the data of left behind women which is estimated at 30,000 in Punjab. It is throwing light on the alarming situation for Punjab government to cope up with. There are many problems related to the language as well which is used for addressing such women as honeymoon brides. It is taken by many women as insulting and dishonoring.

Significance of The Research

The present research throws light on the experiences of wives, children and parents who are left behind by the emigrated family member to foreign land. Human relationships fulfill the social, economic and psychological needs of humans. This research has signified the unique and common experiences and situations of left behind family members in face of making their life world without having any enduring emotional and strong support which can only be received from close relationships, what kind of social actions they have to perform to get much needed support from family, friends, community and society and the kind of impact emigrated people have on their left behind children. In this way, we can perceive and understand the emotional, social and economic aspects of left behind family members in the home country.

Objectives of the Study

The main concern of this study is to discover views, perceptions and interpretations of the family members left behind about the issues/challenges they have to face in context of international migration of

their dear ones. Reasons can be many of their remaining in India. In some cases, husbands don't take their wives along with them and sometimes improper visa applications become the reason. But in the present study, emphasis is not upon having knowledge of the reasons of remaining behind of married women. There are many dimensions of problems faced by such women. Some objectives have been made which are as follow:

1. To explore the problems/challenges faced by women left behind by their husbands.
2. To get an insight into the life world of left behind women.
3. To know how above mentioned women cope with the world around them.

Research Questions

For an ideal qualitative research, questions are constructed in such a way which enables the researcher to get in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of the participants. The open-ended questions were asked to the respondents and the latter were given full freedom to explain their experiences. Some research questions which have been asked to the women left behind are formulated as such-

1. What kind of problems do left behind women face which arises due to the absence of their husbands?
2. How do respondents behave toward problems which are encountered in different situations?
3. What kind of social relations/networks they need to deal with their problems?
4. Do they face economic and social instability?

Research Methodology

In the study of life world, a researcher is expected to leave all the presumptions and presuppositions to collect a data. It is not necessary to make hypothesis. The suspension of judgments is valued. The research itself guides the researcher at every stage (Abraham 1995).

The qualitative research will be done with the help of phenomenological research method. Phenomenology tries to explore the human experiences in different situations and contexts. This method of enquiry helps to describe the life world of the women left behind by their husbands and their viewpoints context of the phenomenon which is an international migration. Sample will include those women who have been married for more than 5 years and still not taken by their husbands to foreign lands with them for the present study. The research will be conducted in the District Sangrur of Punjab. International migration and its implications is an emerging problem in the Malwa region after Doaba and Majha. Data will be collected through snowball sampling. Case studies will be undertaken. Interview guide will be made. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions will be favored which provide flexibility to follow the respondents lead. At the end, the research will also show the number of women left behind who are at the disadvantageous stage and are the victims of consequences of international migration of their husbands.

Findings

The findings of the study are based on the pilot research conducted in District Sangrur (Punjab) to get knowledge regarding problems of people who are left behind by their emigrant family member. This study has included case studies of five left behind women. There is a consequential effect of international migration process on above mentioned women. The absence of husbands matter their wives' positions in the in-laws family as well as outside of it in many ways.

One of the respondents named Asha (anonymous) whose husband has migrated to Dubai told that initially she had no idea about how would she live her life in the absence of her husband and exhibited her frustration and anger on her parents that why they married her to this man and spoiled her life. But with the passage of time she is getting used to it and tries to engage herself in other activities.

The two respondents named Rajbarinder and Manjit (anonymous) has some experiences in common. Both of them have told that after the birth of their children they have become busy in their lives and think less about their husbands. Even their children take stand for them if in-laws or other kinship members do satire on their situation.

The respondent named Harjeet (anonymous) was severely depressed because of her situation. She was worried that she has no idea about what circumstances her husband is going through. Her husband does not call her frequently. She uses the remittances which her husband sends by giving school fee of her children and buy groceries. Her mother in-law is of conservative nature and does not allow her to start any low scale work at home only which would provide a great economic support to the family.

There was a woman named Sarabjeet (anonymous) who explained her situation in a new light. She said that the whole phenomena of international migration of her husband have changed her life. She has started taking her own decisions and lives her life on her own terms. Her children respect their mother's autonomy in house and do not question her decisions.

To put in a nutshell it has been found out that husbands' migration has a voluminous repercussions on their left behind women. In cases where women live with their in-laws, they enjoy less autonomy in decision making and less physical mobility in comparison with those women who live independently in separate homes. The absence of the migrant member leads to many social, psychological and economic challenges. The headship of the family matters a lot in shaping the experiences of the left behind family members. The working women has shown confidence and self dependency in the cases where their husbands do not send economic help to them and it is necessary to add that such women maintain more social relationships in community and develop friend circles which stand by their sides in every thick and thin of their lives. Some women still carry a hope that their husbands would take them with themselves to the foreign countries and their hard

times would meet an end. There was a woman named Sukhwant (anonymous) whose husband has been to New Zealand for the last six years, is spending substantial amount on their children's education and taking care of elderly parents-in-law as they do not get enough remittances for their living. She has a daughter and two sons, who are pursuing higher education and living with her elderly parents-in-law. They have been dependent on their emigrant family member for all their expenditures but the problem has been of not getting the enough remittances. The look after and medical care of the elderly members has not been an easy task to do alone. So the responsibilities have increased a lot on the part of the left behind wives.

Some significant changes have come under notice that the phenomena like international migration totally change the life world of left behind family members specially the wives. In orthodox family structures, daughter-in-laws are kept under cognizance in the absence of their husbands. They have to struggle to maintain their families by not relying only on the economic help by their husbands. Many women have been ridiculed by their relatives. Migration also changes the mentality of emigrant husbands with the passage of time. They allow their left behind wives to do jobs and acknowledge their wives' hardships. Some of the afflicted women live with this hope that their children can get them out of this misfortune by becoming able to earn money and livelihood. But on the other hand, there are certainly some positive aspects which cannot be denied that women of emigrant husbands are facing. Many affected women have joined public forums where they can express their feelings, discuss problems and try to find out the solutions for their miseries by sharing them with the women who are going through the same problems. The suspension of feelings and sufferings strengthen and empower the left behind women. Women have widened their aura of social relationships with the community members, their friend circles also act like support mechanisms at the time of adversities.

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