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**Migration and Gender in Asia**

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Temporary labour migration now affects most countries of the world and displays several major trends. One of the important trends is that a large number of women participate in the global labour market as principal migrant. Even though a large group of women migrated in the past, they did so as part of family migration. Moreover, causes and effects of their migration were assumed to be similar to that of men's (Asis 2006). Over the years, several researchers contributed to the literature on the diverse experiences of woman migrants as short term contract workers, permanent residents or migrants through marriage. Migration is a complex process. There are diversities as well as commonalities with respect of challenges that migrants of different countries of origin face.

This paper concentrates on the participation of women of Asia in the short term international labour market. It highlights the diverse experiences of migration of women from various Asian countries, and tries to link this diversity to migration policies of their countries of origin and gender determined demands for labour in the destination countries. The paper is divided into five sections. Section one highlights the global scenario of female migration while section two presents the Asian trends. Section three presents government policies on female migration of a few selected countries. Section four discusses the work conditions of female workers. Section five highlights the gender implications of migration experiences of women. The concluding section draws some major conclusions.

**A. MIGRATION OF WOMEN: GLOBAL SCENARIO**

Over the last 25 years, the number of international migrants has almost doubled. In the 1980, 99 million people were living outside their country of origin. In 2005 it became 190 million (UN 2007). Compared to the 1960s, growth rate of migrant populations is rather high. This is perceived by some quarters, particularly those representing the receiving countries as a concern. Nonetheless as a proportion of world's total population it remains rather modest.<sup>1</sup> Women constituted just under half (49.6%) of all international migrants in 2005 (UN 2007). Significant share of women in international migration has been noted since 1960s (Zlotnik,2003).

Table 1 : Female migrants as percentage (%) of all international migrants (World Wide)

Year	Female migrants as percentage (%) of all international migrants
1960	46.8
1965	47.1
1970	47.2
1975	47.4
1980	47.2
1985	47.2
1990	49.0
1995	49.3
2000	49.7
2005	49.6

*Source: UN 2007*

According to region wise estimated numbers, Asia stands as the second largest. In 2005 the total number of Asian migrants was 53 million, only surpassed by Europe which had 64 million. (UN 2005). Asia is the second largest region with regard to total stock of migrants. The proportion of women migrants in Asia compared to other regions is the lowest in the world.

Female migration from Europe constitutes the highest percentage (53.4%) with Oceania 51.3%, North America 50.4%, Latin America and Caribbean 50.3% and Africa 47.4%. In other words, except Asia and Africa the number of women migrants exceeded the number of male migrants. Nonetheless, over the last decades growth rate of female migrants compared to male, is higher in Asia. Since the 1980s Asian women constituted the majority of migrant workers in countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. A large number of female migrants in Asia go through irregular channels. So, they are not recorded in the official figures.

<sup>1</sup> Only 3 percent of the global population

Table 2 : Region wise percentage of Female Migrants

Region	% of Female Migrants
Europe	53.4
Oceania	51.3
North America	50.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	50.3
Africa	47.4
Asia	44.7
Total number of migrants	190 Million

Source: UN 2007

## B. FEMALE MIGRATION FROM AND WITHIN ASIA

### Four major types of migration:

Asia has been in the forefront of migration of people all along. People of Asia moved across territory for better life and livelihood. Colonial rule added new dimensions in migration. After the abolition of slavery colonial masters engineered indentured labour and moved people from Asia to all over the world. Since the 1950s many Asian countries experienced international movements mostly of professional and students to Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Over the years Asia has been experiencing increased movements within the region. This has been marked by the growth of temporary short term contract migration. This has created a major scope for movement of semi- and low skilled workers along with professionals and skilled workers. Another important trend in migration within Asia is the emergence of women as principal migrants. In case of migration of women four broad streams are discernable: (a) typical migration of women as dependent spouses of male migrants both within and beyond Asia; (b) independent migration of women for labour; (c) independent migration of women as students and professionals and (d) international marriage migration.

Since the 1950s a large section of Asian males went to the developed world to study and subsequently took up employment. Another group of male migrants of Asia went to developed countries as labour migrants. Under the family reunification policy of the receiving countries these male migrants sponsored their spouses to the countries of their residence.

Labour migration within Asia in its current form mostly started in the 1970s. The price hike in oil in the Gulf created scope for major infrastructural development in these countries. This resulted in large scale migration of all categories of workers - professionals, skilled, semi skilled and low skilled. With a few exceptions all these migrants were men. The Gulf states took these workers to perform tasks under specific contracts and once the contracts were over the migrants were meant to leave. Except for the professionals and the highly skilled other migrants were not permitted to bring their spouses. This is why although 30 to 35 percent of the combined population of GCC countries are migrants, the proportion of spouses is insignificant (Shah, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Since the beginning a small segment of migrant women participated in Gulf countries as doctors, nurses and teachers. They are still engaged in such professions. However, due to changes in the demand of labour market, the number of women as principal migrant has increased dramatically. They got employed in newly emerging manufacturing sectors and as domestic workers. Indigenisation of certain sectors of job market, local women's increased participation in formal employment, the growth of manufacturing sector are some of the reasons that led to creation of demands for women specific jobs. The number of such workers increased in such a manner that resulted in feminisation of international labour force of some of the labour sending countries.

A distinct feature of international migration of Asian women is marriage migration. In the 1970s international marriages mainly took place between western men and Asian women. Since the rise of inter-regional migration, international marriages are increasingly taking place between persons of various Asian countries. Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore have witnessed record

<sup>2</sup> Footnote: In 2005, 26 percent of Saudi Arabia's, 71 percent of UAE's, 24 percent of Oman's and 78 percent of Qatar's population were foreign workers.

number of international marriages over the last decade. 9.9 percent of the total marriages of South Korea involve a foreign wife.<sup>3</sup>

There is a major demand for health professionals in both western and Asian countries. The U.S. alone requires 1.2 million new and replacement nurses by 2014. In the developed west one in every 11 person will be over 80 years of age soon. Those countries will require employing a huge number of care givers for the elderly persons. However in some of the developed countries enrolment in nursing education has reduced drastically. Demand for health professionals is not restricted only to the west. Some of the South East Asian countries like Singapore, Bangkok and Malaysia have developed high quality health services, with the aim of selling health tourism. They also required a large number of nurses every year. Understanding the importance and scope of migration of health workers, some of the Asian countries have liberalised the education system and supported growth of public and private sector training institutions to produce huge number of nurses. The number of nurses training institutions in the Philippines has grown from 30 to 400<sup>4</sup>. The Philippines, Sri Lanka and India have become major sending countries of nurses. They are sending nurses to the west as well as to other Asian countries. In the following section nature and extent of womens' participation in the short term labour market in Asia has been discussed.

#### **Number:**

Asia includes some of the major labour sending countries of the world. These are the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan has gradually joined in the market. Some of these countries proactively pursue female migration while some others restrict them.

In 2006 Nepal sent 178,072 workers overseas. Less than 1 percent of them were women. In 2007 Bangladesh sent 832,609 workers, only 5 percent of them was women. India only recorded migration information of low skilled workers, going to 17 countries. Again workers, who studied more than Grade 10, also do not need to take clearance from the government agencies. So information on a large number of migrants is missing. Nonetheless available data shows that out of 454,628 Indian workers only 0.05 percent were women. Pakistan sent 183,891 workers of which 0.04 percent were women. In sharp contrast to its other South Asian counterparts 52% of Sri Lankan migrants of 2006 were women. This is a decrease in number of female domestic workers in Sri Lanka. At one point of time 90% of its migrant workers used to be women. Philippines sent 1 million workers in 2006. 60% of them were women. It is estimated with regular and irregular combined 80% of Indonesian workers are women (Asis 2006).

#### **Countries of destination:**

Asia contains both destination and source countries of migrants. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman are some of the current major labour receiving countries of the Gulf. South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are some of the major destination countries of South East and East Asia. Japan is not a typical contract labour receiving country yet it takes women workers under entertainment professions. Some twenty years ago countries like Malaysia and Thailand used to be migrant sending countries. Currently they are both sending and receiving countries. Therefore it is difficult to compartmentalize countries as sending and receiving. Within South Asia, the Maldives is the only country which formally receives workers. Mauritius on the border of Africa and is another country which receives labour from Asia.

It is interesting to observe that labour markets of these Asian countries do not remain static. Moreover, the sending countries compete with each other. For example India and Pakistan used to be the forerunners as male labour senders to the Gulf. Later Bangladesh entered the market by offering lower wages. In the early 1980s, when Sri Lanka and Indonesia wanted to enter the market, it was difficult for them to capture the male migrant markets. Therefore, strategically they chose the female labour market. Nepal only entered the market only in the late 1990s. It drastically undercut the Bangladeshi male workers market by offering even lower wage. The receiving countries also like to rotate its labour intake among the source countries for their own

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<sup>3</sup> Of them 42.5 percent were Korean Chinese, 20 percent Chinese and 20.3 percent were from the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam

<sup>4</sup> Health system of some countries of Africa suffered huge losses due migration of their healthcare workers.

benefit. Malaysia is a classic example. It used to take a large number of workers both men and women from Indonesia. To reduce Indonesian migration, during the early 1990s it took large number of workers from Bangladesh. Within a short span of time it became the second largest labour receiving country for Bangladesh. During the 1996-1997 financial crisis, it stopped taking labour from all the sending countries. After the financial crisis was over, it did not renew its agreement with Bangladesh, rather it took workers from Nepal. Again in 2006 and 2007, it more or less stopped taking workers from Nepal but reopened its market to Bangladesh. In 2007, 200,000 Bangladeshi workers went to Malaysia alone.

Thus, it can be argued that women migration is more common in the case of South East Asian countries in comparison with South Asian sending countries. It also shows that destination countries are not static.

### **Sectors of employment:**

At the beginning of contract migration to the Gulf, with the exception of the few in the professional category, all of them were men. A few women participated as doctors, teachers and nurses. Demand for women specific jobs surfaced in the 1980s. Domestic work became the major employment generating sector. Gradually the South East and East Asian countries also started employing women workers in similar professions. As seen earlier Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos are major players in this respect. Indians also work as domestic workers. For example, among the 300,000 domestic workers in Kuwait, the Indians are second highest in number. Officially Nepali women are only allowed to work in formal sectors. However, there are large differences between official and unofficial figures. According to UNIFEM estimate, there are around 70,000 Nepali domestic workers who work abroad. The Department of Labour and Statistics however recorded that only 161 women migrated abroad from 1985 to 2001 as domestic workers.

Gulf countries as well as South East Asian countries have established different manufacturing industries. Garments, electronic assembling are some of the example of such factories. Women from above sending countries participate in this sector.

Entertainment is also an important sector of women's employment. However, the Philippines is the major country which participates in this sector. Japan and South Korea are two major destinations. Recently restrictions have been imposed by the South Korean Government on migration of entertainers to that country. Participation in this sector from South Asia is nominal. This is not to say that women do not migrate from South Asia as entertainers, however, if they do, they do so through informal channels and are thus not reflected in the official figures.

Nursing and care giving to the elderly are other important professions where women participate. Philippines, India, Sri Lanka are the major sending countries. Nursing is considered to be one of the safest jobs for women migrants. Pakistan and Bangladesh also sent nurses but in low numbers.

### **Level of Education:**

A major difference is observed among the domestic workers of the Philippines and Sri Lanka with other South Asian countries. Educational level of Sri Lankan domestic worker is much higher in comparison with others. All of them are literate, significant portion of them passed school finals. According to (Perera 2001), 20% of the Sri Lankan migrants had received primary, 45% secondary and 25% of them had tertiary education. In case of Nepal and Bangladesh more than 80% of them are either not literate or received some elementary schooling.

One can say, demand of workers in certain sector is the single most important factor in bringing the Asian women in the international labour market. Along with the Gulf, South East and East Asia are major destination countries. Women are also working in North America and Western European countries. Women from Asia migrate at a very early age.

### **Marital Status:**

Differences are observed in case of marital status among South and South East Asian women migrants. Half of the South Asian women migrants are married. In case of Bangladesh, this is very much shaped by the Bangladesh government policy. As for quite a while only married women were allowed to migrate. In case of Nepal as well majority women who opted for foreign

employment were married and some with children. A significant portion of Sri Lankan women workers are unmarried. Proportion of unmarried women during first migration is higher in case of the Philippines and Indonesia.

### **Remittances of Women Migrants:**

Over the last decade, remittances have become increasingly prominent, remittance flow to developing countries are estimated to have reached US 240 billion in 2007 (Ratha, 2008). This amount, however reflect only transfer through official channels. The true size of remittances received should be much higher. Studies in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia show that compared to men women migrant sent larger portion of their remittances. As seen earlier majority of the female workers are domestic workers. Their food and lodging are mostly taken care of by their employers. They also do not feel secure to kept their earning in the destination country. Therefore they sent almost all of their earning to their home countries.

Remittances of female migrants helped many of their families to come out of poverty. Studies found that more than half of female remittances were used for daily consumption, health care and children educations. Household surveys in El Salvador and Sri Lanka find that children of remittance recipient households have a lower school drop out ratio (Ratha 2008). In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka these household spent more on private tuition of their children (Siddiqui, Perera 2002). In Sri Lanka the children in remittance receiving households have higher birth weight, reflecting that remittance enabled households to effort better healthcare. Remittance also provided decent livelihood to other members of their families. Along with strong obligation towards own and extended family some of them are conscious about their future and save a portion of the remittance by keeping them in bank or purchasing insurance and investment bonds. All of these have a high social and economic return. A striking example of effects of remittance on poverty reduction comes from Nepal where the poverty had ratio has declined by 11 percentage points between 1995 to 2004.

Since women migrants are absent, remittance are usually utilised by the family. If migrants are married their remittances are used by their husbands and if they are unmarried, these are used by the parents or elder siblings. Due to lack of opportunists as well as lack information on available avenues for investment women migrants can hardly keep control over their remittances. However women developed their own mechanisms of saving for future during subsequent migration. Bank and Non bank financial institutions of Asian sending countries are yet to come up with gender sensitive investment opportunists.

Along with remittances, skills, ideas, attitudes, knowledge and independent decision making capacity are other positive aspects of female migration. These are termed as social remittances. Migrants women knowledge brings positive result in her household and community in many ways. According to UNFPA (2006) such knowledge leads to improved state of family health.

### **C. GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

The nature of female migration from Asia is to some extent determined by their government policies. In the following section female migration policies of some selected countries are discussed

#### **Sri Lanka:**

Sri Lanka can be termed as pioneer in labour migration of women in South Asia. As early as late 1970s its government developed policies to encourage migration of women to Middle East for taking up employment. During the same time large scale internal migration of women was also encouraged through establishment of Export Processing Zones in different urban outskirts of the country. Within a short span of time Sri Lanka became a major player in the Gulf labour market of women workers. By the mid 1980s, 90% of its international labour force became women.

It is interesting to note that when Sri Lanka entered into the international labour market the market for male workers was already saturated. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were strongly present there. Besides, the construction boom for the time being was over. So, demand for male

workers was shrinking. But there existed a major demand for women in domestic and manufacturing sectors. Sri Lanka concentrated on the female labour market. Over a period of 15 years it consolidated its presence in Gulf, expanded to South East Asia as well as to Europe and North America. Since 2000 Sri Lanka has changed its policy and along with female market it planned to enter the male market as well. The second construction boom is witnessed in some countries of Gulf and South East Asia. Now Sri Lanka is also sending a large number of male workers as well. The number of female workers in comparison to males is reducing since then. Last year 52% of the total migrant force was women in comparison to early 1980s when 90 % of the workers were women.

Realising the demand for female labour migrant the Sri Lankan government actively pursued a policy of promoting female labour migration. This was pursued despite opposition of a section of the civil society of Sri Lanka. Now that Sri Lanka has consolidated its presence, the state has become more interested in pursuing male labour migration. This highlights the patriarchal ideology of Sri Lankan State.

### **Bangladesh:**

In early 1981, a Presidential Order barred women workers of semi-skilled and unskilled categories from overseas employment on the ground to protect their dignity abroad. The order was in response to strong demand of the then association of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Kuwait for banning women from migrating. In 1988, government revised its position by replacing the ban with restriction on migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women. But then in late 1997, an almost complete ban was again imposed on migration of all categories of women except those who were highly qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers and teachers. This was greeted with massive opposition by various sections of civil society: women's organizations, labour organizations, professional groups, chambers of commerce, think-tanks etc. They argued that it is unconstitutional and discriminatory against women, and claimed that it would contribute to trafficking of women (Siddiqui 2001)

As a result, government lifted the ban on migration of all other categories of women workers, except domestic workers. In the year 2003 the ministry further eased the restriction by putting an age bar. Unskilled or semi skilled women are allowed to migrate under special permission once they become 25.

The impact of above policy change was experienced straight away. Women constituted less than 1% of the annual labour flow since 1991 to 2003. In 2006, 5% of the total migrant labour force of Bangladesh was women. In 2007 a new government came into power. It took a major stand against malpractices in the recruitment sector of Bangladesh. It dissolved the then Executive Committee of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA). Strong monitoring at the airport was established, fresh negotiations were held with the governments of the receiving countries. As a result compared to 2005, the number of migrants going overseas more than doubled.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nepal:**

When labour migration from Nepal to the Gulf and then to South East Asia and East Asia began in the mid-1990s, women also started participating in the flow. Nepali law allowed labour migration of women subject to permission of guardian. But in March 1998, government imposed a ban on labour migration of women to the Gulf (Adhikari, 2004). This happened after the death of Kani Sherpa, a Nepali migrant domestic worker in Kuwait. Sexual violence against Kani Sherpa by her employer and his friends, and ultimately her alleged murder by the employer created a major social outcry. This ultimately led to the government ban (Sancharika Samuha and UNIFEM, 2003 and Magar, 2004). After continuous campaign by different sections of civil society like women's groups, labour organizations, NGOs, international agencies, media and academia, the ban was finally lifted in January 2003. However, lifting ban only applies to the organized sectors (manufacturing), although it is in the informal sector and particularly in domestic work that the majority of Nepali women have scope of employment (Adhikari, 2004).

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<sup>5</sup> In 2005, 350,000 went abroad, in 2006 it became 800,000.

This obstructive policy environment is endangering women migrants of Nepal. The approach of securing women abroad through restricted emigration has proved useless. It has neither been able to curb migration nor secure women. Because, on one hand, there is large demand for cheap Nepali domestic workers in the receiving countries, particularly in the Gulf; on the other hand, lack of economic opportunities and rising insecurity in Nepal is forcing women to earn a livelihood abroad. But since the policy environment is not in favour of their migration, women are forced to migrate in irregular means. Thus they become more vulnerable during and after migration. Sometimes, recruiters take advantage of the women's vulnerability to fulfill their evil desires (Magar, 2004). The women sometimes fall pray to traffickers disguised as recruiters and end up in involuntary sex work in destination (Adhikari, 2004).

#### **D. WORK CONDITION OF MIGRANT WOMEN**

##### **Wage:**

Problems regarding payment of wage are among the most pervasive ones for women migrants of most of the countries. Paying wages lower than promised is one of the most frequent breaches of contract for them. In Sri Lanka, bulk of whose labour migrants are women domestic workers, non-payment of agreed wages is one of the major complaints of women migrant workers. In 2003, about 20% women workers raised this allegation with the conciliation division of SLBFE (Dias and Jayasundere, 2004). However, the trend seems to be declining as the number of cases reduced from 2,089 in 2002 to 1,437 in 2003 (SLBFE, 2002 and, Dias and Jayasundere, 2004). An important study of women migrant workers from Bangladesh has also revealed similar instances. On an average, the wage that women migrants received was 20% lower than the contract wage (Siddiqui, 2001). Even signing of contract do not guarantee protection (ILO 2004). But the picture is also not very different for the employees of formal sectors like manufacturing and service industries. Wage payment situation is equally depressing for Nepali women migrant workers. For example, the Nepali domestic workers in Hong Kong receive only 60% of their salary (HKD 2,000) stipulated by the law (Dhital, 2004). This is the state of affairs in Hong Kong that is increasingly becoming popular destination with Nepali domestic workers for better work condition. Situation in the Middle Eastern countries is reported to be much worse (Magar, 2004).

##### **Benefits:**

Payment of other monetary benefits like overtime and bonus are not much relevant for women workers who work outside industrial sectors. A recent study show that Sri Lankan women garment workers employed in some of the garments hub of the Middle East like Dubai (UAE) and Amman (Jordan) earn more in terms of overtime than basic wage. Overtime payments can go upto nearly 50% of total monthly earning. But not all are so fortunate. Some of the Bangladeshi garment workers who worked in UAE reported irregular overtime payments. Domestic workers of Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and UAE do not receive any overtime payment (ILO 2004).

##### **Working Hours:**

Working hours is another major aspect of work condition. Long or overstretched working hours is an experience commonly shared by Asian migrant women by and large. Although it is a problem in case of both domestic work and factory work, the degree is much sharper in the former than the later. Heavy workload ranging from 15 to 20 hours a day is frequent among women domestic workers (Dias and Jayasundere, 2004). Studies on Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and UAE show that average working hours of domestic workers per week is over 100 hours which is more than double of standard 40/48 hours per week (ILO 2004). One micro study has 54% Sri Lankan domestic workers employed in the Gulf reporting 18 to 20 hours work day (INSTRAW and IOM, 2000). Even among women migrant workers from Bangladesh, domestic workers are the most vulnerable group with regard to working hours. Three-fourths of them, all employed in the Gulf, worked 15 to 18 hours a day. This again would increase further during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan as the adults of the household did not go to bed before taking their *Sehris* (early morning meals). After going to bed at the last leg of night, the domestic workers had to wake up at early next morning to attend the minors and the elders (Siddiqui, 2001).

##### **Holidays:**

Weekly holidays and leave are necessary for refreshing one's work performance. But women workers do not get them on a regular basis, even though they are entitled to. Women are no exception. However, this does not seem to be a common trend. Studies covering Sri Lankan migrant women haven't given much attention to this aspect. Nearly 88% domestic workers could not have regular weekly holidays. They were not aware of this entitlement. Another 8% were not allowed to enjoy weekly holidays although they were aware of it (Siddiqui, 2001). Situation of industrial workers are however much better. More than 57% Bangladeshi women factory workers in the Middle East had at least one weekly holiday (Siddiqui et al, 2004c). Filipino workers who have taken up work outside the Gulf like in Hong Kong, Korea and the European countries are relatively better off in this regard (Magar, 2004). Because labour laws are more articulated in those countries and their implementation is closely monitored. Singapore also strictly followed regarding weekly holidays. Those working in Lebanon, Kuwait and Bahrain got just one or two days off a month (ILO 2004).

#### **Food and Accommodation:**

Domestic workers have to eat and live with the employers in general. Employers usually organised accommodation for the factory workers. Small proportion of Sri Lankan domestic workers reported that they had problems with poor quality of food or were denied food as a form of punishment. Likewise, 5% of them had poor accommodation (INSTRAW and IOM, 2000). The factory workers on the other hand, mostly in garments, were in general satisfied with their food and accommodation. Most Bangladeshi workers, whether employed in factory or home, initially had problems to adjust with Middle Eastern food. Some domestic workers had other problems as well like given insufficient food and served with stale food. On the contrary, some had abundant food to their disposal and there were employers who bought items that allowed the migrant workers to cook their own food (Siddiqui, 2001).

#### **Workplace Conditions:**

In the Gulf women factory workers found factory temperature intolerably hot. Therefore, it is very hard for someone unused to such condition to work there. Workplace temperature is particularly crucial for Bangladeshi workers as they are from moderate climate region (neither too hot nor too cold). One research on factory worker in Middle Eastern countries shows that factories had sufficient sanitation facilities. Access to clean drinking water also did seem to be of little problem with most women workers. Little less than half of them could drink filtered water and about half of them had to drink supply water. With regard to safety arrangements, factories mostly had emergency fire exits. But more than 88% women workers reported that access to those exits were so inconvenient that they would not be of much help during fire.

#### **Freedom of Movements:**

Domestic workers working in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and UAE reported that their freedom of movement was controlled. These included lack of access to telephone, control over receiving and/or sending correspondence, and social isolation from other domestic workers or friends. According to ILO (2004) around 50% domestic workers in Kuwait, Bahrain and UAE alleged physical, verbal or sexual abuse. Such instances were much lower (37%) in Lebanon. Sexual abuse was mostly perpetrated by employers (sponsors) as well as their sons or other men visiting (ILO 2004). Because domestic work involves individualized work condition, isolation from other workers, least likelihood of establishing networks, absence of social protection, lack of legal recognition as work leading to lack of legal protection as a worker etc. A section of domestic workers are irregular in status. They work in a private sphere without contract. Without legal protections do not report abuses they are subjected to fearing loss of job. (Human Rights Watch 2005)

#### **Abuses:**

Approximately 10% of the women migrant workers from Sri Lanka have harassment and abuse as serious problem. However, it is difficult to measure the extent of 'harassment' since it is not defined (Dias and Jayasundere, 2004). But it continues to form a considerable proportion of the complaints lodged by women migrants, domestic workers in particular. While in 2002, approximately 17% complaints of domestic workers were of harassment, it was nearly 20% in 1996 (SLBFE, 2002 and CARAM Asia, 2002). Another estimate found rate of verbal abuse,

physical abuse and sexual harassment respectively as 6%, 9% and 20% among domestic workers. On an average 24.5% of Bangladeshi women factory workers in the Middle East, mostly garment employees have reported verbal abuse by supervisors and fellow workers. Nepali women migrants have also experienced verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Any statistics on their extent is hardly available. However, cases of such sufferings, particularly from the Middle East are frequently reported in Nepalese media (Magar, 2004 and, Sancharika Samuha and UNIFEM, 2003).

### **Healthcare:**

Labour laws of the Middle Eastern countries in general require employers to provide health and safety insurance for migrant workers. However, this excludes several categories of workers including domestic workers. Therefore, in many cases domestic workers have to pay for their own healthcare that is often quite expensive from their limited earning (CARAM Asia, 2002). Despite that their access to healthcare is not ensured, as some employers might not allow them to seek such facility when it is required.

### **Social Protection:**

Most of the receiving countries of women migrant workers offer limited protection to them. The reality of these countries involve existence of laws discriminatory in terms of gender, race and citizenship; insufficient legal recognition, lack of legal protection, inadequate access to legal support, ineffective enforcement of law etc. Only 57% domestic workers in Kuwait have health and social security coverage. Those from Bahrain, Lebanon and UAE were not privilege of any such provision. Studies also reveal that system for addressing foreign workers' complaints is inadequate or non-existent in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and UAE. Running away from the employer's household is illegal and punishable. That will result in police search with the runaway worker's photograph published in local newspapers. Any person who hides or protects her is also considered to be an offender. When found, she is imprisoned and then deported. If the worker decides to go back home or is going to be deported, she still needs to retrieve her passport from her employer. In some cases, the employer return the passport in exchange of non-payment of due wages. In addition, domestic workers fleeing or running away from exploitative working conditions are subjected to inhuman treatment in the hands of the authorities who treat them as criminals (ILO 2004). Although these problems are high in the Middle Eastern countries, they are also evident in South East and East Asian countries to considerable degree.

### **Positive Changes in the Receiving Countries**

Improvements have been noted in some cases. For example, UAE has issued a new law in May 2001 requiring agents to put cash funds in some banks to insure the increasing cases of wage decrease (CARAM Asia, 2002). Bahrain is reviewing its labour laws and making its sponsorship laws more flexible wherein change of employers is permitted (CARAM Asia, 2002). On 26 March 2003, the government announced a national plan to assist abused workers in emergency cases. The plan includes temporary shelters or "safe houses", a help hotline and a variety of other measures to which expatriate workers, especially domestic workers, can resort to in case of harassment by their employers. The plan also includes the issuing of a rights and duties manual for those intending to work in Bahrain and a simplified guide to be distributed in embassies, recruitment officers and points of entry to Bahrain (ILO 2004).

Jordan has recently introduced an amendment concerning registration of recruiting agencies. It allows the ministry of labour to monitor the work of these agencies and take actions against them if they violate the regulations aiming at protecting migrant workers. The country has also introduced the system of "Special Working Contract for Non-Jordanian Domestic Workers" with support of UNIFEM and ILO. While Jordan's labour law does not include any protection of domestic workers, under this arrangement, migrant domestic workers will be treated in compliance with international human rights standards. It provides with limiting fraud of illegitimate contracts, life insurance, medical care, a designated day off a week, rest days, repatriation upon expiration of the contract, legal minimum wage and equal salaries to Jordanians performing the same work (ILO 2004).

Lebanon has created a computerised databank that records the entries of all migrant workers with the names and addresses of their employers/sponsors. It will enable to trace the employers in case of misdeeds. The Lebanese government has also established a complaint procedure. However, this system is not giving satisfactory results due to following reasons: lack of trust in the system, lack of information about complaint procedures and serving the interests of employer. Most recently, the government has instituted a US\$1,000 bond on registration of sponsorship to be lodged by the individual employer with the Central Housing Bank. The bond is intended to cover the air ticket of runaway domestic workers and other contingencies in case of grievances presented by the worker. But this system is criticised as some employers/sponsors who want to avoid its payment resort more often now than before to undocumented workers who even suffer from a larger number of abuses than documented workers (ILO 2004).

### **Proactive Protection Measures in Sending Countries:**

Sri Lanka took several institutional measures to protect its women worker. Pre-departure skill and awareness trainings, compulsory registration in SLBFE, free insurance coverage, provision for pension scheme, low interest pre departure loans, low interest housing loans, scholarship for women migrant children, distribution of school books and equipments, organising health camps for left behind family members are some of the incentives used by the government. Sri Lanka is also largely successful in ensuring protection at destination countries by signing MOUs and ratifying relevant international conventions on migration including the 1990 UN Convention on protection of all migrant workers and their families.

In order to ensure that women's migration endeavour was a safe one, the government of Bangladesh has put certain conditions of protection. The security deposit of the recruiting agents who wish to send women was increased to Bangladeshi Tk. 5 million. In addition, the government also encouraged the private sector to develop training centres for providing specialised professional skill, communication skill and awareness training to the female migrants. Three such centres were been set up under private initiative. Aspirant women were trained on the use of domestic appliances, taught basic English and Arabic languages and given awareness about their legal entitlements in respect to wage, accommodation and medical services.

## **E. GENDER IMPLICATIONS OF MIGRATION OF WOMEN**

### **State Policies**

These sending countries constitutionally guarantee equality of opportunity for work and freedom of movement to their citizens of both sexes, yet many of them, through promulgation of laws and circulars, from time to time, they have imposed restrictions on such movements of women for international migration. This mindset of state of putting restrictions on women's migration is derived from traditional patriarchal notion of honour and dishonor of family and state associated with control over women's mobility. Sri Lanka is a classic example. Due to economic necessity it developed proactive policy to encourage its women to migrate. Now that it has strongly established itself in the global labour market it has changed its tone and does not proactively look for job markets for their women. Rather, it is now exploring new markets for men. This highlights the double standard of state. When necessary, it pursued migration of its women. Now that women migration is no longer crucial to its immediate economic well being, it is reverting to traditional ideology men as principal bread earners. Sending country governments should acknowledge the reality of feminisation of international migration. Instead of enacting laws that restrict movement of women for work, adequate information should be made available so that aspirant women migrants can make an informed choice.

### **Women's participation and gender equity**

Traditionally men were perceived as bread earners and women were seen in their reproductive roles. Globalization has created opportunities for women's participation in certain types of factory work both inside and outside the country which require women to move. This has definitely complicated traditional patriarchal division of work and space as public and private. In Asia everywhere women move internally and internationally to take up employment. This does challenge the traditional notion of men being the bread winner. International migration, no matter how exploitative it may be has successfully established women's role as principal earners. Again,

in many cases male counterpart of women migrants agree to women's migration, jointly accumulate resources as they see cost of women's migration is lower and job opportunities for women are higher. This has ensured the participation of men in power sharing dialogues with their female counterparts.

#### **Gendered Division of Labour within Households**

Studies on left behind families indicate that when men migrate women take over double responsibility and successfully perform the house hold functions. However, when women migrate a section of the husbands do become more careful children's upbringing and education. They never take up gender specific roles in household maintenance. In the Asian context, the extended family take over some of the tasks which used to be performed by the woman migrant.

#### **Role of Women in Family Decision Making**

Some of the studies on the consequences of migration highlighted that particularly upon return, some women had difficulties in maintaining their newly acquired power in family decision making. This has lead to conflict between husband and wife, father and daughter or sister and brother. When women asserted their position in family decision making. The same studies show that a large number of women could retain their share of authority over family decision making through using their negotiating skills which they developed during staying outside the hierarchical family structure. Researchers appreciate that there are marked differences between the woman who departs for migration and the one who returns from it. Therefore, the outcome of migration on gender relationships is not homogenous.

## **F. CONCLUSIONS**

Though Asia is the second largest migrant producing region of the world, it produces the least number of female migrants. The female migrant labour force does not constitute more than 5 percent in any of the South Asian states other than Sri Lanka. Domestic work constitutes the most important occupation of the migrant work force, followed by employment in manufacturing sector. Feminisation of international labour force has taken place in some of the South East Asian labour sending countries that include, Indonesia and the Philippines. Almost one half of Cambodian migrants are also women.

Four distinct forms of female migration is visible in Asia. These are migration of women as dependent spouses, migration of professional workers, temporary contract migration of skilled and low skilled workers and migration through international marriage. This paper mostly highlighted the trends of skilled and low skilled women workers who are temporarily working mostly within Asia as contract workers. The paper highlights primacy of temporary labour migration over permanent migration since the early 1970s. It underscored the increasing prominence of Asia as work destination. It demonstrated that Middle Eastern countries created job opportunists for both men and women of different Asian countries.

Since 1990s the singular importance of the Gulf region as receiving country in Asia has declined. Some of the South East Asian and East Asian growth economies have also emerged as labour receiving countries. During the initial phase work opportunities were mostly created for men. Since the 1980s some jobs emerged in the market which created scope for female migration. The demands for female specific job have resulted in feminisation of international workforce of some of the labour sending countries. Both Middle East and South East Asian countries required women's labour as service worker, particularly domestic workers as well as in manufacturing sectors.

International labour migrants have been identified by ILO as the most vulnerable section of international work force. Compared to men women migrants are more vulnerable. Like their male counterparts the women migrants experience confiscation of travel documents, withholding and non-payment of salary or salary reduction, harsh working conditions, lack of freedom of movements and communication etc. In addition, verbal, physical and sexual abuse is an issue that a section of women migrants have to face. Individual countries through bilateral negotiation

attempt to resolve these problems. A common stand of sending countries regarding the rights of migrant workers in general and female migrants in particular is yet to emerge. The only example of agreement between two sending countries has been between Philippines and Indonesia.

Over the last 30 years labour sending countries of Asia has developed their own policies, programmes and institutional structure to govern labour migration. Philippines have become a model for other countries in these respect. In case of governing female migration both Philippines and Sri Lanka have come up with innovative programmes which include mandatory 15 days to 1 month pre-departure training. India and Philippines have achieved major successes in the area of quality training of nurses. This has resulted in increasing the number of skilled migrants and therefore reducing labour exploitation and increasing remittance. However there are very little inter-governmental initiative to systemically learn from each other. Sending countries can gain immensely from the experience of these countries

Female labour migration is a complex process and it involves a number of parties: governments, recruiting agencies, employers and money transfer institutions. A migrant woman also need to know the socio-cultural environment of the destination countries, work conditions, procedures of sending remittance and opportunities available for investment of migrant remittance. She also requires information on all the above issues. Recently, in Bangladesh a media campaign has been launched under which television plays and talk shows, display of messages through bill boards, mega signs, public service announcements through television and radio have been organised. At the same time for grass roots activation Migrants Rights Protection Committees have been established in some migration intensity districts of the country. This model may be taken up by other South Asian countries for raising awareness about various aspects of migration, including those of female migrants.

The Philippines and Sri Lanka have developed some institutional capacities to provide protection to female workers in the destination countries. The other South Asian countries may follow the two examples and establish easy access hotlines and shelter homes for female workers who have difficulties with employers. They may also consider providing legal assistance to female migrants who have work and legal status problems. In some destination countries women workers go through periodic mandatory pregnancy tests. If they are found to be positive they are sent back home or have to abort. Provision for reproductive and mental health care services to the migrant women in the countries of destination needs to be facilitated.

In Asian countries policy played a major role in determining the nature of migration. Being a late entrant in international labour market Sri Lanka accessed it through sending female migrants. The Philippines has also played a proactive policy in ensuring market of female workers. As India, Bangladesh and Nepal imposed bans and restrictions on female labour migration from time to time the number of females in the stock of international migrants is relatively low. It is perhaps due to this factor that these countries have experienced flow of women through irregular channels.

Most Asian states send female migrants to provide services at the low end of care giving sector, India being the exception that sends highly skilled nurses. There is a burgeoning demand for nurses in global market. Demand will rise in the Gulf states as well as developed countries of the world including North America and Europe. A major problem in accessing the market is the quality of nursing training that exists. The other South Asian countries may consider uplifting their training standard by establishing links with the Indian training institutions.

National data on migration is collated differently by state agencies of various SAARC countries. The absence of standard data hinders quality comparative research. The Task Force will encourage states to agree to a set of common indicators that may be developed by concerned experts and demographers so that there is consistency and standardisation in migration data.

The paper found that there is a similarity of problems that the Asian countries face in migration governance. Each of the countries has attempted to address the problems in their own ways. This paper strongly argues periodic sharing of experiences among the sending countries of Asia to

learn from each others experience. This will also help reducing unhealthy competition among these countries.

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