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Negotiating Male Migration: The Experience of Women in Goa

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Abstract:

When males migrate for better prospects how do women negotiate domestic and public spheres in the absence of men? What are the impacts of male migration on women left behind? The paper explores the multiple and complex dimensions of the term impact, criss-crossing the social, psychological and economic dimensions.

Goa has a long history of male migration among Catholics both on shore and off shore. Using case histories from women in Cuncolim village in Goa, the paper examines and attempts to understand the various ambivalent processes that make up the multiple coping strategies among women. It also suggests that male migration may or may not provide emancipator potentials for women, though the co-operation of women is critical for the migration of males. The paper also demonstrates the changes in the gender relation both at the personal and social level that are inaugurated by male migration.

1. Introduction

Migration as a social phenomenon is as old as human beings. The history of migration depicts that man has always moved from one place to another for greener pastures. Migration from Goa to different parts of the world is not something new and there is documented data from at least the 16th century (D'souza 1979: 54). M.N. Pearson also states that Goa had been open to the Arabian Sea and its littoral even before the Portuguese arrived. Nevertheless Goan migration has never been uniform it has been in sporadic form (Gracias 1999). Gracias (1999) classifies Goan migration in to three important phases. The early initial migration to the neighbouring kingdoms (16th to 17th Century), migration to British India and Africa (19th to first half of 20th Century), and the postcolonial migration to the Gulf, the West (Europe and America), Australia and New Zealand (1961 to 1990). In all these phases of migration in Goa there is a striking point of Christian's migrating to a greater extent as compared to any other religious group (Mascarenhas 1987, Gracias 1999 et.al). During the first two phases customs, tradition, religion and food habits imposed restriction on Hindu migration. The Dharmashastras imposed a ban on travel outside India for Hindus of upper classes. Travel across the salt seas was also considered polluting (<http://www.goa-world.com/GOA/goanaway.htm> - _ftn9). This ideology and thinking had far reaching effects on the third stage as most of the Hindus were faithfully following this Ideology. On the other hand Christians took advantages of the available opportunities in each of the phase. For example in the first stage a few Christians migrated to Portugal for educational purpose. In the second phase (nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century) Goan migration was of socio-economic nature. It was the outcome of many factors. Among these was the British occupation of Goa and the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1878.

During the Napoleonic wars Goa was occupied by the British. Their ships were anchored there and Goans went to work on them. When these ships left Goa for British India, the Goan staff went along. As result of Anglo-Portuguese Treaty, the British took the responsibility of building railways linking Goa with the rest of India, which improved the means of communication and transport and made travelling easy and fast. In addition, high cost of living, unemployment, better job opportunities abroad, social problems and lack of educational facilities can be cited as some factors that forced Goans to migrate. Thus this gave birth to a new class of people called 'Tarvotis' within the already existing caste system.

Goans migrated in large numbers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and they did so mainly in two directions – to British India and Africa (<http://www.goa-world.com/GOA/goanaway.htm> - _ftn10). (Significant to note here is that Portugal supported Goan Migration because the remittances were invaluable to the stability of Goan economy (Brettel 2006: 157). In a way the Portuguese policy of using emigration as a safety valve rather than developing the region was responsible for the migration of Goans as there were shortage of opportunities. In India, Goans migrated primarily to Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and Pune. To British India a few Hindus also migrated (Gracias 1999). Those who went to Africa were mainly Christians concentrated around East Africa (<http://www.goa-world.com/GOA/goanaway.htm> - _ftn11). A small number went to Burma. A large number of Goans again Christians worked also as ship hands, sailors, stewards and cooks in passenger and cargo liners, which at present is the number one employment opportunity for the male members of Goan society. However today non-Christians have also taken up to being a seaman (colloquially known as 'shippie') as over the years working on ship have redefined status thus leading to the reinforcement of working on the ship, off late female members have also taken up to working on the ship mainly cruise liners.

In 1880, about 29,216 Goans, predominantly from Old Conquests left Goa (<http://www.goa-world.com/GOA/goanaway.htm> - _ftn12). By 1910 their number had gone up to 47,334. In 1935 around 38,788 Goan Catholics were absent from their homes (<http://www.goa-world.com/GOA/goanaway.htm> - _ftn13). Various events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided impetus to the migration of Goans from Goa. According to an estimate of 1954 about 180,000 Goans were away from their home

(<http://www.goa-world.com/GOA/goaway.htm> - _ftn14) (Gracias 1999, D'Souza 1991). Another important point here is that because of the process of 'Christ-Westernization' during the Portuguese rule. Christians got westernized and thus could gain jobs in the west and westernized places like Africa, as they could adjust easily to the culture and there was also no restriction from the religion (especially food) (Gracias 1999).

The third phase of Goan migration is the post-colonial period (1961-1991) this period is dominated by migration to the Gulf (Oman, Kuwait, U.A.E, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain) Western Countries like Portugal, U.S, UK, Australia and Canada. The migration during this phase was driven by both sociological and economical factors. Thus as stated earlier Catholics have migrated to a greater extent as compared to Hindus. This is gleaned from the fact that every able bodied Goan of whatever rank, educated or un-educated regard migration as a natural course and take advantage of every first available opportunity (Mascarenhas 1987: 72). However till 1990 Hindus did not consider international migration, which was the characteristic of the Catholics, as an option they would pursue, they did not consider it appropriate for their husbands to leave their wives behind. They considered it unthinkable to spend most of ones life, or even a life time away from their motherland. They also did not feel the need as they lived in joint families and most of their needs were met. Migration among Christians especially males has been and still continues to be prevalent, despite relative improvements in the economic conditions. However after the 90's non-Christians have also migrated as they saw the huge benefits migration brought with it.

Nevertheless migration to the Gulf and Ship has dominated the psyche of a Goan, this is evident from the fact that there have been a high number of Goans in the Gulf and working on the ship as compared to other parts of the world. In both of these cases there is a pattern of migration. In the first case (Gulf) Goan migration to the Gulf is different from permanent Goan migration to the West, Australia and New Zealand. Goans migrate to the Gulf for certain periods of time. They cannot settle there permanently because of local laws that do not encourage permanent migration. Goans go to the Gulf as "guest workers" on contractual jobs for a definite time period and return after the expiry of the period. Sometimes it is extended up to the entire working years of men's life and other times to 2 to 15 years. When their work is over, they generally return home to Goa, while others settle permanently elsewhere.

Goans who have migrated in recent times to the Gulf belong to all classes. The majority of those who migrate are from the age groups of 18 to 35 years. Unlike earlier migration to Africa, those who migrate to the Gulf countries are all communities of Goa. However, in the early stages of migration to Middle East, it was confined primarily to Christians. This could be due to reasons mentioned earlier, connected with restrictions imposed on them (Gracias 1999). In the second case Goans work on ship (Cargo and Passenger) for a period of 6 to 9 months generally and join back when they receive a call. They usually spend 30 to 60 days at home. Thus in both the cases the migration is not permanent.

Various studies on Goan migration has revealed that there has been a profound economic impact on those left behind, where the migrant and the migrants family members have benefited. However these studies of Goan migration have been limited in their scope as they have focused on the push and pull factors responsible for Goan migration, the economic benefits and the formation of Goan Diaspora and Goan identity at the international level. There has been no comprehensive research study undertaken till day that focuses on or reveals the impact (sociological, psychological and political) of migration on those who have been left behind or that give us a concrete picture of the changes in the Goan family vis-à-vis society due to migration. Further the studies undertaken have limited the scope of development/progress only in economic terms. Probably that is because, what the researchers felt was the ultimate goal of Migration in Goa.

Migration has generally been gendered in nature. It is observed that males migrate to a larger extent as compared to females, though there have been exception to this trend. The main reason for this has been the patriarchal system, which was and still continues to be dominant.

2. Migration and Gender Sensitivity

Males have monopolized every sphere of life including migration. Consequently, the focus by political scientists, economists, anthropologists, as well as sociologists has been on male migration. Despite the upsurge of interest and the large number of studies undertaken in the last few decades an important limitation of migration studies has been the emphasis on male migration and gender issues being sidelined.

Feminist have rightly demonstrated the need for gender related issues in migration. One obvious question is what impact does migration have on women left behind? The term impact can be divided into two, first those analysing the impact on migrants, and, second those analyzing the impact on women left behind. Another category of migration is where women move out with their husbands or close relatives. However my interest is confined to the impact that male migration has on the women left behind which makes my research gender sensitive.

3. The Impact of Migration on Women

Studies focusing on the influence of migration on women have been few and those focusing on the impact of migration on women left behind have been even fewer. A UNESCO (1984) study reports about women whose male house hold members migrate, and in their absence have to take on more physical workload, emotional strain, and financial burden as the male task are taken up by the women. Though other male relatives do provide help, management of kin ties becomes an important task for women. Even as women serve as temporary heads of households, for very long periods at times it does not substantially alter traditional norms concerning women's place or division of labour.

Elizebeth Gorden (1994) through her study on Lesotho women brings to light, the plight of these women who live their lives in reaction to the overwhelming out migration of their husbands and live apart for much of their married lives, resulting in the erosion of family relationship. While men's absence promotes the independence of their wives, who enjoy their new emancipatory

role, this impact is seen as further minimized by extended families. The study demonstrates that wives experienced significant strain, mostly in situation where there was greater responsibilities, fewer resources and longer exposure to their husband's migration.

In her study titled 'In the Absence of their Men, Gulati (1993) demonstrates the positive influence on women in Kerala, whose men migrate to West Asia to improve their status. They regularly send home remittances, which is managed by the women (mothers, wives) making them dominant figures in their households. However these women face many challenges and take on much more work than expected by the conventional gendered division of labour. These women also face life by taking on male task and mobilizing male support from other networks. Through networking and managing relationships these women circumvent and overcome the handicap of illiteracy, work of households and familial interdependence, handling of finances, planning family size, engaging in income generation and similar activities.

Connel (1984) in the study titled 'Status and Subjugation? Women, Migration and Development in South Pacific' demonstrates how migration of a male may affect the fertility, due to lack of proper contact with his wife. How migration has contributed to the increase divorced rates, as male migration regards agricultural work as trivial and demeaning. Hence the value of rural life and rural wife also declines. However both man and women experience loneliness and psychological pressures that direct them towards new partners, while others gain strength from their separation and prefer a single status.

Menon (1995) in her study titled 'The impact of migration on the work and status of Tribal women in Orissa' demonstrates, when a migrant's income does not mitigate poverty or compensate in any form for the problems faced by women during the absence of men, it makes male migration problematic for women. Menon did not find women overtly favourable to male migration, and yet she found women also encouraging male migration, perhaps for the purpose of survival. She also observed men showing little concern for their young and pregnant wives.

Nagli Kebria (1990) in the study on Vietnamese immigrant community tries to explore the effects of migration on the gender roles and power. The women groups and networks play an important role in the exchange of social and economic resources among household and in the mediation of disputes between men and women in the family. This community forms an important source of informal power for women, enabling them to cope effectively with male authority in the family. Yet despite their increased power these women supported a patriarchal social structure, because it preserved their parental authority and promised greater economic security in the future.

Zachariah and Rajan (2001) proposed in their study on migration in Kerala, that a subtle transformation has occurred among the wives of migrants, leaving a lasting impact on Kerala society. Women are less capable of handling the pressures that arise due to their spouses migration, leading to trauma like situation. However at the end of the day, the trauma is worth as they become well equipped to face the world on their own.

Mascarenhas (1993) in the study 'International Migration: The changing identity of Catholics and Hindu Women in Goa', tries to examine the relationship between the different categories of female migrants, with particular emphasis on the processes which have led to changes in the socio-economic role and hence the identity of the two categories of women. In case of Catholic women the males have migrated abroad, while in the Hindu women's case, it is the women who migrate from rural areas to urban areas. However with regards to Catholic women she provides with three main patterns of migration. Firstly, independent migration of unattached females, i.e invariably adult, generally low castes; have migrated to work as domestic servants and ayahs for families in India (Mehta 1960 quoted in Mascarenhas 1989). A small contingent comprises of upper castes women who migrate to work as teachers, and office staff, usually because they had become the sole breadwinners of the house, owing to the death or desertion of their husbands or fathers.

Secondly, there is associational migration of women, since the probability of catholic women marrying migrants is high, wives expect and are expected to be mobile. Many adult women have accompanied or joined their husbands abroad. Even when wives have joined migrant husband, a period of conjugal separation has been inevitable for many because of tremendous emphasis placed on education of children and commitment necessary for ensuring access to appropriate facilities (Mascarenhas 1990: 113). Thirdly, for some there is a habitual residence in Goa: some wives only join their husbands for short holidays. Husbands who work in gulf and on the ship are rarely accompanied by their wives because of the temporary uprooting of the family is expensive, inconvenient and in particular disruptive to the children's education.

Following the brief review of literature I would like to shed light on some of the important questions that can be raised over here, and which the study will address in its due course. What impact does migration of a man have on the women left behind? Is the main question, associated with this question is how do women cope up with the responsibilities bestowed upon them? Can women's cooperation and sacrifice be seen as a means of success for male migration? What ways do women negotiate male migration? Why? Can migration of a male be seen as a means of perpetuation of gendered division of labor? What benefits do women enjoy due to male migration? Does male migration lay any hindrance in the movement and mobility of women? Apart from these questions that have been raised the study specifically tries to bring to the fore the issue of male companionship and sexuality of women, which has always cried for sociological attention. Nevertheless, this issue has very often been made transparent through movies and novels. In Goa the folk theatre called 'Tiarts' have very often shed some light on this issue. Thus these questions and the issue raised substantiates the scope and genuineness of my study, however I am not forgetting those who have already worked on similar themes as mine and I know that their findings and insights would certainly be very useful.

4. Methodology and Design

In order to deal with the questions that I have raised, I adapted the qualitative method of research. As I felt this method was best suited, which would help in the explanation and understanding of the issues that have been raised. Under the qualitative method I chose the 'life history', which is a new method and at the same time is interesting, challenging and provides a lot of information.

In brief life history is any retrospective account by an individual of his life in whole or part, in written or oral form that has been elicited or prompted by another person. The life history account may close at an earlier point of time or at the moment the subject is relating or writing it down. We use the term "autobiography" by contrast to refer to a person's self initiated retrospective account of his life, which is usually but always in written form.

The study involved extensive interviewing in order to explore the lives of women left behind. Initially though ten women had agreed to share their experiences with me, later only five agreed. The place chosen for this study was Cuncolim, which is in the Salcete taluka of Goa. It is approximately 13 kilometres from Margao, the commercial capital of Goa. Cuncolim is a place where people of diverse religions consisting of Catholics, Hindus and Muslims co-exist in peace and harmony. Outward migration, especially to the Gulf, the western nations and on ship is a common phenomenon, not just in Cuncolim but in several other villages in Goa. However this pattern of migration is generally seen to a greater extent among men and Christians. The study as a result is limited to the impact of migration of married Catholic men on their wives left behind.

5. Analysis/Findings

The cases that have been studied are varied and complex. Each case provides us with interesting and varied dimension, of the impact that migration of a male has on the woman. All the cases though varied have one aspect in common, that is, all of the married men have migrated abroad. In such a situation all these women were faced with coping with the responsibilities in the absence of their men. The cases also show the manner in which each one managed the absence of her man was dependent on the situation in which each one of them was placed. On the basis of the five case histories and my empirical observation of women apart from these five, few important issues have been observed and described below.

5.1. Marital Life Cycle

It has been evident that marital life cycle follows the migration pattern of the husband. Let us start with the young brides. Their husbands migrate within a month of their marriage and they have not had time to conceive or bear a child. Even when they return back, their duration of stay is just for four to eight weeks. This period is socially very hectic and emotionally draining. The wife in this case spends just a few weeks with her husband, who works on the ship, and the same process continues every time he comes, making her psychologically and emotionally weak and resulting in her becoming unfit to bear a child. In other cases of migration most of the women had succeeded in bearing a child within a year or two. The condition of these women with children was comparatively better than the childless ones. Women with children felt more secure and also had a clear cut role to play in their husband's family.

5.2. Interdependence

In the absence of their men, women are bound to depend on their in-laws, parents, friends, and neighbours in order to cope with different situations. In most cases the mother-in-laws had also gone through a similar situation like this, which in some cases helped them to have a better understanding of their daughter-in-laws. Parents and in-laws played a vital role in providing support to bring up the children and in strengthening the emotional well being of the women. Support from in-laws was based on whether the woman became a mother or not.

Friends and neighbours were very important to the woman to cope with the absence of her husband. The woman's life became difficult in cases, where there was no help from relatives, whatever the reason. In some cases the woman tried to fulfil her emotional and other needs by developing extra-marital relationship.

5.3. Marital Relationships

In the absence of the man, the wife's relationship with her husband was found to be positive or negative based on the following factors given below.

- a. The type of Family Members: whether the parents and in-laws are understanding and supportive.
- b. Proper communication with the husband.
- c. Support from husband.
- d. Ability to bear a child.

Marital relationships may become problematic if any of the above factors are in the negative.

5.4. Child Care and Education

In the absence of the father responsible parenting becomes the duty of the mother. The women in my study found this duty challenging, rewarding and fulfilling the goal of motherhood. Children's education was given utmost importance and was easily managed by the women in the absence of their husbands. For working women this task became easier when they received assistance from some other family members. For example we see how well Anna in one of the cases managed different responsibilities with the help of her parents. Taking up children's lessons was also much easier when most of the members of the family were educated and my study showed that many of them enjoyed this task, which also kept them busy.

5.5. Communication

Communication with the husband was mainly through letters and more through phone calls. The frequency of communication differed from one family to another. A phone call or a letter always improved the emotional wellbeing of the wife and made her feel loved and cared. During the calls the wife discussed with her husband some of the problems she faced, while she avoided those things that would upset him. The frequency of phone calls reduced after the first year of marriage, while in some cases the

wife initiated the reduction to lower costs.

5.6. Money Management

Another responsibility that a woman takes up in the absence of her man is managing the finances appropriately. Money management involves two aspects, managing money for household consumption and managing money as savings. Every month a major amount of the salaries go in saving. These savings are later used to enhance the social status by building a new house, buying a new car or a bike, investing in a land, etc. Money is also deposited in the children's name for their future, and for their education and medical expenses. Money is generally sent in the wife's name, though a small amount is also sent separately to the mother. All financial transactions are managed by the wife but in the case of building of a new house we see how Priya under the guidance of her husband manages the money, as she has to pay different people involved in building the house.

5.7. Mobility

The question of mobility of women whose husbands have migrated is a complicated one. The extra responsibilities that these women have to shoulder both within the private and public spheres compel them to be more mobile. The extent of shouldering various responsibilities among these women differ from family to family and so too the mobility of women. When it comes to social gatherings, weddings, parties, and anniversaries Some of these women feel out of place without their husbands and also worry about what people will think about them. This forces them to be cautious and make sure some family members or their children, if they are grown up, accompany them at these functions. These women however have hardly any restriction when it comes to shopping, reaching the children to school, banking and visiting their parents. In some cases they may also stay with their parents whenever they want.

5.8. Negotiations and Compromise

In Cuncolim village in Goa the unique characteristic of male migration abroad is that the men have migrated before their marriage. This is evident from all my field work. The women who married these men definitely negotiated and compromised for some benefits at the time of marriage. Women agreed to marry these men who were working abroad primarily for future security - for themselves, their children, children's education and career and old age. They also desired economic security, higher social status and upward mobility. But these women did not get what they desired so easily; they had to reckon with and compromise their own careers in some cases and their emotional, psychological and physical well being. The economic benefits and the co-operation of women have been important factors for the success and reinforcement of male migration among the Catholics.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions that have been drawn are based on the questions and issues that have been raised and which seek explanation and understanding

1. The impact that migration of a man has on his wife, involves a process of negotiation, sacrifice and hardship both on the part of the husband and even more on the part of the wife, since she has to live with the various responsibilities that are thrust on her. Taking care of in-laws, children, maintenance of the household, organizing the remittances in an appropriate way, etc are some of the responsibilities (see also Gulati 1990). Migration of the head of the household abroad becomes a painful process when there is no one in the house, or there is no help from relatives or when there is neglect on the husbands' part of regularly sending remittances.
2. Women generally tend to adjust with the migration of their men for security purposes, both economic and social security concerning the present and the future well being of the family, with top priority given to children's education and career.
3. In order to cope with male migration, women employ different strategies, which differ from person to person depending on the situation. One of the basic strategies employed by women is to confide with a friend or a close family member. Women are able to cope better with the absence of their husbands when there is someone to share their joys and sorrows. In other words, family networks and friends circle play an important role in coping with the absence of men (Gulati 1990)
4. Some women who are unable to cope with the absence of companionship and sexuality of their husbands, tend to get involved in extra-marital affairs (Connel 1984), either to satisfy their own desires or sometimes for the sake of survival of their family members. In such situations of neglect by husband and other family members, the wife tends to cope with the stress and feeling of worthlessness by attempting suicide.
5. Migration of a husband in some cases hinders marital relationships. In some cases it also hinders the chances of bearing a child, which in turn stigmatises the wife, leading to her ostracisation and boycott in the family as well as in society.
6. Women also sometimes sacrifice their own career and well being for the sake of their husband, children and family at large, thus contributing to the success of male migration. This in turn reinforces migration of a male for the welfare and security of the family, thus making male migration successful due to the co-operation and sacrifice of women (Kebria 1990, Menon 1995).
7. Migration of a male abroad also contributes though unknowingly to the gendered division of labour, as women are always supposed to look after the house and children.
8. Women of migrant households may or may not become mobile. However my study reveals that the new and additional responsibilities women have to shoulder, both within and outside the house, compel them to be more mobile. The extent to which women have to take on new responsibilities differs from family to family (Gulati 1990 and Mascarenhas Keyes 1990).

To conclude, women have always been legally, politically, socially, and psychologically subjugated by men. The establishment of capitalism and with it the emergence of wage labour, migration and greater individualism within nuclear families has tended to separate families from community and women from men. The migration of men physically emphasizes this isolation and occasionally brings with it conflict and tension leading families to deviate from the culture and values of their society. However, in general, economic remittances reinforce a traditional set of values and, through the inequality of migration tend to reinforce, rather than reject the existing social hierarchy. Hence in this kind of situation, and there are certainly others, women are denied the opportunities to participate in a broadly based economic development vis-à-vis their own development.

Women's experience in the absence of men ranges from relative security to bitter frustration, acute personal stress and emotional dissolution as well as content and discontent. Women at the same time tend to negotiate the migration of men by supporting migration, in order to provide security for the future, both for them as well as their children. However as in similar situations elsewhere in the world the impact of male migration on women's life is complex and varied. On one hand women may gain independence, autonomy and competence in new skills and status as household heads, but on the other hand they may lose independence and status through over dependence on remittances And also suffer poor health and welfare. However the conclusions cannot be more precise because few such studies have being under taken and many perceived effects are a function of time, apart from local and national, social and economic structures, and the perspectives of the researcher.

7. Limitations of the Study

1. The study is class restricted, in a sense it tends to focus on a given class and the conclusions that have been made may have been different, with reference to other classes of women.
2. The study has a limited number of respondents, which could be more and this may have added several other insights making the study more interesting and rich in its orientations.
3. The study is limited to the wives of male migrants, while it fails to see the other side with reference to what do males go through in the absence of their family.

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