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## **Gendered Experiences of Migration: A Case Study of Women Migrants from Rural India**

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***ABSTRACT:** The migration of women or female migration has emerged as an important field of research within the larger domain of migration studies and is being extensively explored under various disciplines. This research study explores migration through gender perspective. The paper discusses the various factors influence rural women to migrate and problems of Migrant Women Workers. The data for this research has collected from various secondary sources as well as primary sources. The migrant women workers face several problems such as low wages, health hazards, sexual exploitation and denial of their fundamental rights. Through this study the researcher aims to analyse the life of these migrant women workers.*

***Keywords:** Gender, Migration, Challenges, Factors, Discrimination*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Migration has always been a part of human history. Fisher states, “The history of migration is central to our understanding of world history. From the origin of “Homo Sapiens” people have been migrating from one place to another for various reasons.” (Fisher 2014). The contemporary discourse in migration studies emphasize the gender aspects marking a shift from the traditional analysis of migration where only the male migrants were perceived as active movers. The women migrants were labelled as the passive movers/dependent migrants as evident in the use of phrases such as male migrants, migrants and their families, their wives and children which were commonly used by the scholars in migration studies (Hiralal, 2014). Women migrants are underrepresented in migration studies due to social limitations, patriarchal dominance, and structurally ingrained conventional standards, all of which contribute to the



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under appreciation of their contributions to economic development. The expansion of global markets and the concomitant socio-economic transformations in recent decades have led to a quantitative increase in women's movement world-wide since the 1990s. Since then, female migrants started migrating to work in the households and commercial service sectors as international labour migrants (Yamanaka and Piper, 2005). Datta, (2005) has also pointed out that, the feminization of migration is gaining prominence with the increased numbers of unskilled female migrants in some streams surpassing that of men. The United Nations Population Division data covering both documented and undocumented migrants revealed that the number of female migrants grew faster than the number of male migrants between 1965 and 1990 in the most important receiving countries. The present study is focused on migrant women and girls, given that they are uniquely and disproportionately affected by gender-based discrimination, abuse and violence. This study seeks to examine migration through a gender lens, with a focus on relevant gender-based human rights concerns relating to migrant women from rural India. The study also looks into the root causes of women's migration, and the specific challenges that women face at all the different stages of migration.

### **Gender as a "Social Construction"**

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, ongoing developments in feminist theory contributed to a focus on gender rather than individual decisions made by men and women. Gender is regarded as a fundamental organising principle that underpins migration and related processes such as adaptation to a new area, continued contact with the original area, and possible return. The key point is that, whereas sex is defined as a biological result of chromosomal structures, gender is "socially constructed." Gender is viewed as a sex-based matrix of identities, behaviours, and power relationships constructed by a society's culture. It is socially constructed and reconstructed over time in this sense. This means that gender content — ideals, expectations, behaviours, and expressions of masculinity and femininity — will vary across societies. Furthermore, when people interact with one another, whether by adhering to or departing from this content, they either reaffirm or change what gender means, affecting social relationships at



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a particular time or in a particular setting. Gender is not unchangeable, but it does change and is thus socially constructed and reconstructed over time. However, Gender is a social construct that refers to the cultural and societal expectations, norms, and roles associated with being male or female. It is not determined solely by biology, but rather shaped by societal beliefs and practices, and can vary across different cultures and time periods. Gender is a fluid and complex concept that goes beyond the binary of male and female. It intersects with other social identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, and shapes individuals' experiences of power and privilege in society. Recognizing gender as a social construct is crucial for achieving gender equality.

### **Relationship between Gender and Migration in Indian Context:**

The relationship between gender and migration is a multifaceted and intricate one, characterized by a complex interplay of social, economic, cultural, and political factors that profoundly influence the experiences and outcomes of individuals who undertake the journey of migration. Gender is a fundamental aspect of one's identity that shapes and is shaped by the migration process, touching upon various dimensions of an individual's life. It encompasses not only the reasons prompting migration but also the pathways chosen, opportunities pursued, and the unique challenges confronted during migration. This dynamic interaction between gender and migration is critical to understanding the complexities and disparities that exist within migrant communities and has significant implications for social policy, human rights, and global development.

One prominent facet of the gender-migration relationship is the distinction in migration patterns between men and women. Men and women often embark on distinct migration trajectories driven by varying motives and expectations. Men may predominantly migrate in pursuit of employment opportunities in labour-intensive sectors such as construction, agriculture, or manufacturing, while women may engage in migration for roles that include caregiving, domestic work, or family reunification. These gendered migration patterns result in differences in employment prospects, income levels, and vulnerability to exploitation. For instance, women may find themselves more susceptible to abusive labour practices, including low wages, long working hours, and limited access to legal protection.



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Moreover, the responsibilities and roles that individuals assume within their families and communities, influenced by deeply ingrained gender norms, can significantly impact their migration decisions. In many societies, women often shoulder the burden of caregiving and family maintenance, which may compel them to migrate in search of opportunities to support their families. This decision often entails leaving behind their homes and communities, resulting in personal sacrifices and emotional burdens. On the other hand, men may face societal expectations to become breadwinners, which could push them towards seeking employment abroad, despite the challenges and uncertainties that migration may entail.

The gendered dimensions of migration extend beyond the initial decision to migrate and permeate the entire migration journey, affecting various aspects such as social integration, access to healthcare, education, and legal protection. Women, in particular, may confront specific challenges related to cultural norms, language barriers, and social isolation in their host countries. These challenges can hinder their ability to fully engage in the social, economic, and political life of their new communities. Additionally, the risk of exploitation, human trafficking, and gender-based violence is often higher for women and girls during the migration process, reflecting the vulnerabilities they face.

Recognizing the intricate relationship between gender and migration is imperative for developing policies and interventions that effectively address the diverse needs and rights of migrants of all genders. It underscores the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive approach to migration governance, encompassing policies that ensure equal opportunities, protect against exploitation, and promote the well-being of all migrants, irrespective of their gender identity. Such an approach is essential for achieving equitable and inclusive outcomes within increasingly diverse and mobile societies around the world. Ultimately, the relationship between gender and migration underscores the significance of acknowledging the unique experiences, vulnerabilities, and contributions of individuals based on their gender identity within the context of global mobility.



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## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

**Amba Panda (2021)** in her article "*Feminization of Indian Migration: Patterns and Prospects*" explores the increasing participation of women in migration in India. The author cites evolving economic and societal variables that have caused traditional gender roles to change and made it possible for more women to relocate both within and outside of India. The article makes use of a variety of sources to highlight the factors that have contributed to the feminization of migration, such as the rising demand for female workers in fields like healthcare and hospitality, the decline of industries with a male preponderance, and shifting social attitudes towards women. The article also discusses the challenges faced by women in the migration process, including discrimination, exploitation, and violence. The author emphasizes the need for policy responses that take into account the specific needs of women migrants and provide greater protection and access to services.

**Tittensor D. & Mansouri F. (2017)** in "*The Feminisation of Migration? A Critical Overview*" has critically analysis of this concept, questioning the validity of the term and the assumptions it entails. They argue that the feminization of migration is not a clear-cut phenomenon and can be interpreted differently depending on context, and that the concept may actually obscure important differences and inequalities among migrant women. The review ultimately calls for a more complex understanding of gender and migration that takes into account intersecting factors such as class, race, and nationality.

**Sinha Babita et al. (2012)** in "*Migration and empowerment: The experience of women in households in India where migration of a husband has occurred*" examines the relationship between male migration and women's empowerment in India. The article analyzes various studies that highlight the negative impacts of male migration, such as economic insecurity, social isolation, and increased domestic responsibilities for women. However, the authors also consider the potential positive effects of migration, such as increased decision-making power for women and exposure to new ideas and opportunities. Overall, the review suggests that the relationship between migration and women's empowerment is complex and context-specific, and that further research is needed to better understand this relationship.



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**Bhattacharyya S. & Korinek K. (2007)** in their article *“Opportunities and Vulnerabilities of Female Migrants in Construction Work in India”* examines the opportunities and vulnerabilities of female migrants in construction work in India. The authors analyze various studies that reveal the challenges faced by women working in this male-dominated industry, such as harassment, discrimination, and poor working conditions. However, the review also highlights the potential benefits of construction work for female migrants, including increased economic independence and improved social status. The authors call for greater recognition of the contributions of female construction workers and for policies that support their safety and well-being. Overall, the review sheds light on the complexities of gender, migration, and labor in India's construction sector.

**Mutayoba V. (2018)** in *“Influence of Patriarchal Traditions on Women Decision to Migrate”* explained influence of Patriarchal Traditions on Women Decision to Migrate. The intention of the study was to find out how patriarchy ideology influences rural-urban migration for women. Specifically, this paper explained how patriarchal traditions influences women decision to migrate.

**Das (K.C, 2010)** in his study on *“Female migration to the mega cities of India”* uses census data at two periods of time, (viz) 1991 and 2001. It is found that most of the migrants to the three cities of India (viz) Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore originate from relatively backward states of India. The volume of male and female migration has increased in all the six mega cities during 1991 and the proportion of female migrants to the total female population has increased in all the cities except Chennai and Hyderabad where it has declined. Majority of female migration in India is due to family reasons like marriage and family. But still a significant proportion of women are migrating for economic reasons like employment, business and education. Most of the female migrants who are moving to cities are either illiterate or semi-literate.

**Goyal et al (2009)** arrived at the following findings in their study of women workers in the organized retail sector in Ludhiana. Modern retailing has opened up employment opportunities for women who are considered to be more suitable for certain jobs in the retail industry. Women



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employees are the preferred choice in certain product categories like food and grocery, cosmetics, kids wear, jewellery, home décor and apparels. Very few older women are found to be employed in this sector. Most of the girls here are unmarried and are educated up to 10 Plus Two level. In most of the cases the male head of the family is not found to be working under these circumstances, the earnings of the respondent become the mainstay. A common factor underlying migration of women was the poverty of the family in the original place of residence.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The following objectives are:

1. To analyze the various types of female migration in the Indian context.
2. To understand the factors that influence women to migrate from rural India.
3. To examine the challenges faced by women during their migration journey, including issues such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and exploitation.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The research is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. A systematic review of the existing literature on women migrant labour from rural India has been collected from various resources. The review will follow a structured approach to identify relevant studies, gather required data and information, and synthesize the findings. Therefore, the study is largely exploratory in nature and follows both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The data for this research has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. For secondary resources such as research papers, reports, books, and government publications through using academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, as well as government websites and other online resources. And primary data has been collected through case study method. The data collected from secondary sources was analysed using content analysis. This approach involves analysing the text of the documents and identifying the themes and patterns in the data.



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## **TYPES OF FEMALE MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL INDIA:**

Female migration is a diverse phenomenon, and women may migrate for various reasons and in different ways. Here are some common types of female migration we generally examine from the rural areas of India.

### **A. Labour Migration:**

**Domestic Workers:** Women often migrate to work as domestic helpers in other countries. They provide household and caregiving services in exchange for wages.

**Factory Workers:** In some cases, women migrate to work in factories and manufacturing industries, especially in regions with labour shortages.

### **B. Economic Migration:**

**Entrepreneurs and Business Owners:** Some women migrate to start businesses or invest in economic ventures in other countries.

**Professional and Skilled Workers:** Women with specialized skills or professional qualifications may migrate for career opportunities.

### **C. Marriage and Family Reunification:**

**Marriage Migration:** Women may migrate to join their spouses or partners who are residing in a different country.

**Family Reunification:** Female family members may migrate to reunite with their families already settled in another country.

### **D. Education and Academic Migration:**

**Students:** Many women are migrating to pursue higher education, including undergraduate and graduate degrees, in foreign countries as well as within their own country and state.

**Academics and Researchers:** Women are migrating as academicians to take research opportunities or to teach at international institutions.

### **E. Trafficking and Forced Migration:**

**Victims of Trafficking:** Sadly, some women are forced into migration through human trafficking, often for purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour.





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**Forced Displacement:** Women may be internally or externally displaced due to natural disasters, conflicts, or other crises.

**FACTORS INFLUENCE RURAL WOMEN TO MIGRATE:**

The push-pull approach is the theoretical framework used to examine the determinants of female migration. This approach focuses on analyzing the conditions that force people to leave their homes and the conditions that attract them to new places. Female migration is viewed as the result of a balance between push and pull factors. The study divides the variables into several categories, including economic, socio-cultural, demographic, educational, natural and climatic indicators, to identify the factors that determine female migration.

**ECONOMIC FACTORS:**

The study looks at a number of economic indicators, including the rate of labour participation, unemployment rates, average size of landholdings, and accessibility to irrigation, to determine the factors that influence female migration. These variables are analyzed in the context of their potential impact on female migration.

**Poverty, unemployment and work participation:** Female migration can be driven by a variety of factors, including economic, social, and political factors. The destruction of traditional occupation structures and the reduced survival opportunities in the area of origin lead to female migration (Sasson,1982). Village studies conducted by Adhikari,1996; Seddon et al, 2001 reveal that poor women migrate to other villages and nearby towns and cities where development work is being carried out. Economic hardships in the form of poverty and lack of employment opportunities force them to migrate to other places for survival. Therefore, women may be compelled to migrate owing to their economic condition (Araya, 2005). On the other hand, the creation of a gender segregated labour market through the process of globalisation creates a demand for female labourers in the informal labour market (for example, export processing zones, garment industries) which acts as a pull factor for female migration (Shanti, 2006).

**Irrigation & Female Migration:** The provision of irrigation facilities is the most significant factor in the creation of employment opportunities for they induce changes in the system, pattern and intensity of cropping. Females work participation rate is highest in irrigated areas as



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compared to non-irrigated areas (Sahu,1986). A village study by Epstein, et al (1998) in the southern states of India shows that expansion of irrigation facilities creates more employment opportunities for landless labourers and also attract migrant labourers. A study carried out by Jan Berman (1985) in district of Surat in South Gujarat finds that certain structural developments like canal irrigation, electrification programme and capital accumulation have led to diversification of rural activities, which in turn have induced leading to in-migration of skilled or caste-specific groups and out-migration of local labour and poor tribal. In his study 58 percent of all migrant labour is women. In his view their migratory behaviour is highly rational since the risks to be faced in the event of moving out are less than those of starvation back in the village.

**Land holding and Female Migration:** Land is considered as one of the major economic assets of a household as it provides economic security to people, apart from being a permanent source of income. Landless and land-poor households typically rely on the sale of their labour for farm and non-farm activities. Control over cultivable land is critical to livelihood security and thus provides a choice whether or not to migrate (Rafique,2003). The evidence to date suggests that those with limited access to land and other assets are more likely to migrate (Desihnger,2004).

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS:**

Apart from economic factors, non-economic factors also influence female migration. Social and cultural factors also an important role in migration. Sometimes family conflicts, the quest for independence, also cause migration especially, of those in the younger generation. Improved communication facilities, such as, transportation, impact of television, good network communication, the cinema, the urban oriented education and resultant change in attitudes and values also promote migration; the sufficient conditions are the other socio-cultural factors which motivate them to move. Several complex factors account for greater female migration besides the usual factors of pull and push, poverty being important among these; new factors such as newly developing markets for women's work, improving levels of education and skill development, a great desire for improving one's own and one's children's lot, and the loosening of parental and societal control over women are becoming equally important.



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### **DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS:**

There are various demographic factors that contribute to the migration of people from rural to urban areas. These factors include age, gender, family size, population growth, and education. The differences in the population growth rates of the different regions of a nation have been found to be a determinant in the internal migration. Fertility and the natural increase in population are generally higher in rural areas which drift the population towards the city. Other important demographic factor in internal migration is marriage because most of the times females are used to follow their spouses.

### **EDUCATIONAL FACTORS:**

Education can also affect women's migration pattern, as it does with men. It has been widely observed that propensity to migrate increases with education (Connell, et al 1976). Increased education seems to encourage more migration of women (UNESCAP, 2003), and in turn foster greater education of females. The role of education in shaping female migration patterns needs to be investigated further, especially in the light of increasing educational attainments of women throughout the developing world (Hugo 1993).

### **CLIMATIC FACTORS:**

Natural and climatic factors also affect the migration of people. The environmental and climatic factors such as, temperature, rainfall, quality of soil, availability of natural resources, natural disaster like floods, droughts, cyclones, storms, earth quakes, famine, etc. also explain the rural to urban migration. As water is essential for human life, scarcity of water compels the farmers to leave their places for long periods to get alternative livelihood options. The increase in number of frequent droughts is also one of the key push factors in the rural to urban migration. Connell et al. (1976) found that due to 1974 flood in Bangladesh, population of Dacca increased by 20 per cent as a result of migration of people from rural areas. Despite the low magnitude of the impact of crop yield changes on migration rate has been shown in study, the presence of linkages between weather variability, agriculture and migration that it elicits and conclusively establishes here suggests that migration could still be an important adaptation option in India (Viswanathan and Kumar, 2013).



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### **Challenges Faced by Female Migrants at Work and workplace:**

The author of this research paper also tries to find out the problems faced by the migrant female labourer at workplace and in the place of destination after migration. As large number of women who migrate from rural areas to urban areas are employed in daily wage labour and in informal sector. Due to the uncertainty in unorganised sector, job insecurity is major concern for them. As the migrant workers increased the supply of labour in labour market, it results into the increasing competition for jobs among migrant female workers and native workers. Because of a huge supply of paid domestic workers in a given area, there is always the threat of losing the job. The supply often exceeds the demand and as a result, a lot of workers continue to work in extremely harsh, demeaning conditions. This also results in a lowering of their wages, Sexual harassment at workplace is also one of the major problems faced by migrant female workers. Due to the harsh working condition migrant domestic workers are vulnerable to sexual harassment at workplace. Already disadvantaged by their gender, class and caste status, domestic workers are often at the receiving end of sexual abuse. This is further aggravated because of their migrant status. This problem of sexual harassment at work place is majorly found among domestic, construction and other workers of casual nature.

More female migrants have been migrating independently in recent years for work, education, and as heads of households. In comparison to male migrants, female migrants may face stronger discrimination, are more vulnerable to mistreatment, and may face double discrimination as both migrants and women in their host country. Nonetheless, male migrants face vulnerabilities during the migration process. Gender-responsive migration data has the potential to promote greater equality and provide opportunities for underserved groups.

Migrant women are especially vulnerable when it comes to labour market inclusion and decent work. According to the United Nations, for instance, women make up 73.4% of international migrant domestic workers; yet, only 26 countries have ratified the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers (No. 189), which is imperative for promoting the rights and dignity of domestic



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workers, while recognising the specific forms of discrimination and abuse faced by women. The issue of violence against women is one all-too-common denominator underlying the distinctive challenges that female migrants face along the migration route.

## **CASE STUDIES:**

### **Case Study 1: Domestic Work and Exploitation**

#### **Scenario:**

Rita, a rural female migrant, moves to the city to work as a domestic helper for a wealthy family. However, she faces numerous challenges in her workplace.

#### **Challenges:**

**Informal work arrangements:** Rita's employment as a domestic worker is often informal, without written contracts or legal protections. This leaves her vulnerable to exploitation, as her rights and entitlements are not clearly defined or safeguarded.

**Long working hours and lack of rest:** Rita is expected to work long hours without proper breaks or rest days. Her work extends to evenings and weekends, leaving her with limited personal time and affecting her overall well-being.

**Low wages and delayed payments:** Despite the demanding nature of her work, Rita receives minimal wages that are often delayed or withheld. This financial instability makes it difficult for her to meet her basic needs or plan for the future.

**Isolation and lack of privacy:** Working in a private household isolates Rita from her social network. She may have limited opportunities to interact with others or access support systems, increasing her sense of loneliness and vulnerability.



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**Verbal and physical abuse:** Rita may face verbal or physical abuse from her employers, exacerbating her feelings of powerlessness and compromising her emotional well-being. The lack of legal protections and fear of reprisals make it challenging for her to seek justice or report the abuse.

### **Case Study 2:**

#### **Agricultural Labour**

**Scenario:** Sara, a rural female migrant, seeks employment in the agricultural sector in a neighbouring region. However, she encounters significant challenges related to gender inequality.

#### **Challenges:**

**Gender-based discrimination:** Sara faces discrimination and bias in the agricultural labour market. She may be assigned lower-paid tasks or excluded from higher-skilled jobs due to her gender, limiting her earning potential and career growth.

**Lack of access to resources:** Sara encounters difficulties in accessing agricultural resources, including land, credit, and technology. Limited access to these resources inhibits her productivity and prevents her from maximizing her potential in the agricultural sector.

**Work-life imbalance:** Balancing agricultural labour with household responsibilities becomes a significant challenge for Sara. She often has to juggle demanding work in the fields with domestic chores, leaving her with little time for personal rest or self-care.

**Inadequate healthcare support:** The agricultural sector often lacks proper healthcare services or insurance coverage for workers like Sara.



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### Case Study 3:

#### Construction Industry and Unsafe Working Conditions

**Scenario:** Lina, a rural female migrant, moves to a rapidly developing urban area to work in the construction industry. However, she faces several challenges related to workplace safety and working conditions.

#### Challenges:

**Lack of safety equipment:** Lina works in an environment where safety regulations are not adequately enforced. She is not provided with proper safety equipment such as helmets, gloves, or protective gear, exposing her to the risk of accidents and injuries.

**Heavy physical labour:** The nature of Lina's work in the construction industry requires intense physical labour, including carrying heavy loads and working in precarious positions. This puts a strain on her physical health and increases the risk of musculoskeletal issues.

**Discrimination and harassment:** Lina often experiences discrimination and harassment at the workplace, as the construction industry is predominantly male-dominated. She may face gender-based slurs, exclusion, or unequal treatment, creating a hostile work environment.

**Long working hours:** Lina is frequently required to work long hours, including overtime, to meet project deadlines. The demanding work schedule leaves her with little time for rest or personal activities, affecting her overall well-being.

**Lack of training and skills development:** Lina may lack access to adequate training and skills development programs in the construction industry. The absence of opportunities for skill enhancement limits her career growth and advancement within the sector.



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## **CONCLUSION:**

Migrant women, who comprise half of the total migrant population in the world, provide important social and economic contributions to their countries of origin and destination. Migration can offer women and girls opportunities for personal and professional growth, leading to improved self-esteem, independence, and greater control over their lives. Additionally, exposure to diverse gender norms may promote gender equality in their countries of origin. However, migrant women and girls are vulnerable to discrimination, abuse, and human rights violations during their journey due to discriminatory policies and cultural norms. A lack of understanding about the experiences of migrant women hinders the development and implementation of gender-responsive laws, policies, and programs, preventing these women from fully enjoying their human rights throughout their migration process irrespective their homeland including rural women migrants. The experiences of women migrants from rural India highlight the unique challenges and opportunities that arise when individuals migrate from one location to another. These challenges and opportunities are often shaped by gender roles and norms that are deeply ingrained in Indian society. Women face a range of difficulties during the migration process, including limited access to resources, lack of social support, and the burden of caring for their families while also seeking work. However, the experiences of women migrants also highlight their resilience and resourcefulness. They often develop networks of support with other women migrants and find ways to navigate the challenges they face. Moreover, migration can offer women opportunities for personal and economic growth, as they gain new skills and experiences that can help them support themselves and their families. To ensure that women migrants from rural India are able to fully realize the benefits of migration, it is important to address the structural inequalities that underlie gendered experiences of migration. This can be done by providing access to resources such as education and training programs, ensuring that women have access to social support networks, and promoting policies that recognize the contributions of women migrants to the economy and society as a whole. In conclusion, the experiences of women migrants from rural India highlight the complex interplay between gender, migration, and social inequality. By recognizing and addressing these issues, we can create a more equitable and just society for all.





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