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**Experiences of Immigrant Nepalese Women Workers in South Korea: A  
Study**

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## **Abstract**

The present dissertation aspires to undertake the study on the experiences of the Emigrant Nepalese female workers in South Korea. While in a foreign employment, most of them have achieved their empowerment despite the gender issues and violence. Back home the traditional patriarchal society posed them hurdles and they were economically dependent on their families and husbands. But, after their foreign employment, they have themselves been breadwinners for their families and are constantly supporting former as they have been earning a handsome sum there. This has empowered them and helped change the perception of their society and families back home.

I have used the concepts of gender, patriarchy and structural violence. The gender and patriarchy have existed in Nepalese society and later on have some impacts in their workplace in a foreign land too in the form of structural violence and gender exploitation. Despite these challenges, they have been working harder and have achieved their empowerment. The term ‘empowerment’ including its three aspects like identity, agency and critical consciousness, has been employed as another theoretical lens along with the gender. The empowerment has been the result despite the gender and structural violence on the way.

The study is based on the sixteen semi-structured interviews and newspaper articles and government publications as the secondary sources. There is the use of Skype for interviewing the women and other respondents like a journalist, embassy officials and a social worker. I have also conducted live interviews with some women workers and a family member of one of these workingwomen, in Nepal too. The findings talk about the causes of foreign employment of these women and pull and push factors like poverty, conflict, gender and globalisation and the impacts like economic support in the family, help in poverty reduction, establishment of business, children’s education etc. These causes and impacts are dealt in the context of the Nepalese emigrant women in South Korea and at last the problems and challenges undergone by them have been shown. The empowerment has outweighed the problems like gender inequality and structural violence these women undergo.

**Key Words:** Gender, Patriarchy, Structural Violence, Migration, Foreign employment, Employment System in Korea (EPS), Empowerment, Women empowerment

## Abbreviations

APMRN	Asia Pacific Migration Research Network
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPN UML	Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist Leninist
DFID	Department for International Development
EPS	Employment Permit System
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
ICTJ	International Centre for Transitional Justice
ICIMOD	International Center for Integrated Mountain development
ILO	International labour Organisation
INSEC	Informal Sector Service Centre
NIDS	Nepal Institute of Development Studies
NRNA	Non-Resident Nepalese Association
PLA	People's Liberation Army
SONSIK	Society of Nepalese Students in Korea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programs
UNGA	United Nations' General Assembly
UNESCO	United nation Economic and social council
UNIFEM	United Nation development fund for women
UNSCAP	United Nations social commission for Asia and Pacific
WOREC	Women's Rehabilitation Centre

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Presenting the Topic**

International migration is a complex and controversial issue encompassing the temporary and permanent crossing of the national frontiers either fleeing from the political or religious prosecution or searching for a better life (Chung, 2014). It incorporates all the aspects like poor and rich countries, skilled as well as unskilled and documented as well as undocumented ones. A person who is from the outer countries in a particular nation and is to be engaged or has engaged in an activity giving him or her an income (UNGA,1990 Article 2.1). Millions of people from developing nations move abroad in search of better opportunity of employment and good education from that they can improve their livelihood (Yang, 2004).

Emigration of Nepalese-whether men or women-has been very common these days, as they seek better livelihood opportunities abroad. In Nepal, as there are no good employment opportunities for the working age population, they fly to other countries<sup>1</sup>. The Nepalese women have been indulged in foreign employment since many years and one of the very important causes is the better schooling and future of their children. They send their salaries regularly, for paying the school fees of their children. They send money also to back up the family for the daily household chores. Though patriarchal set up, the women nowadays are excelling the men in terms of earning. Previously, the dominance of the males was more in migration, but by 1990 the number of the women migrant surged and was far higher both as family members and independently. The Asian and African women are primary wage earners working in domestic and cleaning jobs, care taker of children and elderly and nurses and aids in the hospitals (UNSCAP, 2003).

In Nepal, due to the patriarchal system, the women undergo the gender -based discrimination in their daily lives. This discrimination has a direct relation with the traditional culture that designs a relationship based on a hierarchy between men and women (Pokharel, 2008 :81). Discrimination against the women is prevailed in the Nepalese societies as that is embedded in the socio-cultural norms paving way to the ideology that is determinant of families and relation

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<sup>1</sup> In the migration year book 2010 (2) it has been stated that approximately about 1100 Nepali adults fly to foreign countries for the employment opportunities. Their contribution makes up about twenty -five of percent of the gross national income (GNI).

between men and women (Khadka, 2014:1). They have a lower status than that of the men. Regarding the earning and property, despite their longer hours of works than men in the agrarian activities, they have a little access over the resources and earning in terms of the acquisition of the property (Basnet 2010:17). This condition of the women might have resulted from the prejudices which are being followed from long time back and give the more power to men paving the way for unequal access to food, health, education, finance and resources (Subedi, 2010).

In my research ‘Experiences of Emigrant Nepalese women workers in South Korea: A Study’, I have projected the experiences of all kinds undergone by the Nepalese women immigrated to South Korea. By coming into the foreign soil and working on their own, they are earning better wages and also learning new culture and ideas. Along with contributing their families in their livelihood, they also have contributed a lot to the revenue of the government with the remittance that helps the socio-economic and political development of the country.

These emigrant women face social and gender exploitations, misbehaviours and ill -treatments from the employers and sometimes even by their male co-worker’s time and again. In short, even though women employment in the foreign land on the one hand empowers the women and transforms their living conditions, it can be apprehended that they face some gender issues and exploitation in their journey, on the other. In this way, they have faced a mixed experience there.

### **1.1.1. Presenting the Problem**

The earning and learning of these emigrant Nepalese women in the foreign land is contributing for bettering the socio-economic status of their families and the nation as well. These women have learnt various theoretical and practical aspects of life and have also tried to adjust according to the environment. Considering these facts, the rate of women involving in foreign employment has been increasing and so as in South Korea. Also, the issue of gender equality is getting its momentum day by day. With the focus on it by various governmental and non-governmental sectors everything has been gender –sensitive these days. Even further, it has been developing as the area of research and studies too.

Due to the growing role of the international organizations in gender education policy making, there has been increment in the study and research on the gender education.<sup>2</sup> As the promotion of gender equality has been one of the goals of Millennium Development Goals of United Nations in 2000 AD (MDG), the endeavors for the betterment of gender equality have been even stronger.<sup>3</sup> The importance of gender equality has been growing day by day in the field of education. The attainment of the gender equality in education will provide every boy and girl an opportunity of realizing their human rights by passing on them the skills and attitudes to achieve their full potential within and outside the system of education as UNESCO (Bangkok)<sup>4</sup> opines.

The women migration has brought an economic empowerment to the women and has helped the families back home. However, they are also undergoing various risks and challenges on the way of this empowerment like in origins, transits, destinations and return, throughout the cycle of migration (WOREC<sup>5</sup>, et.al.2011). The life in foreign soil is not as easy as it seems. There are a lot of examples of mental and physical stress, abuse and exploitation of various kinds in the work place. In view of this fact, I have focussed on their divergent voices and experiences connecting the theories of gender, agency and empowerment in one of the popular employment destinations for Nepalese- South Korea.

### 1.1.2. Presenting the Research Questions

- How has the employment opportunity in South Korea empowered the Nepalese women workers?
- What challenges are they facing in foreign soil?
- How are they coping with those challenges on the way to their empowerment?

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<sup>2</sup> Arnot, M. & Fennell, S. (2008) "(Re)visiting education and development agenda. Contemporary gender research". In Fennell, S. & Arnot, M. (Eds.) *Gender Education and Equality in a Global Context. Conceptual frameworks and policy perspectives*. Routledge: p. 2. (Accessed on 03.03. 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: pp. 2-3

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Office in Bangkok: *Gender Equality in Education* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/gender/what-is-gender-equality/> (Accessed on 03.03.2017)

<sup>5</sup> Women's Rehabilitation Centre Nepal (WOREC-Nepal) submitted the shadow report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 49th Session in 2009 in collaboration with the Migrant Forum in Asia, Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics, Women Migrant's Human Rights Center of Korea(WMHRCK)Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea(JCMK), POURAKHI Nepal ,Youth Action Nepal and Pravasi Nepali.

## **1.2. Previous research on the matter**

There have been some previous studies on how the migration began in Nepal. But, the previous studies are about the general migration to the gulf countries and only few are about the Nepalese women migration to the South Korea which began much later. Of late, there is a growing trend of the youths going to South Korea because of the attractive salary and the fast-growing development. About the women migration to South Korea, there have been less study and researches as this is a new destination for the women workers. Here, firstly, I am reflecting upon the studies on the general migration to South Korea and present my motto of studying on the Nepalese women workers in South Korea as a point of departure.

Regarding the condition of Nepalese emigrants in foreign land, a study carried out on the migrant workers from Nepal came up with various issues during their study in Malaysia. It has shown more serious issues like the need of insurance of right to live as the workers there are illegal and take to suicide and criminal works because of the pressure; they are cheated everywhere- this series begins from manpower company, airport, hostels (maltreatment), by the company by giving them less wages than promised, overtime work without pay and police not filing their complaints because of the bonded condition; the loots on them and insecurity; the suicide and indulgent in crime for overcoming the situations and inaccessible legal service etc. (National Human Rights Commission Nepal, 2013:14-15).

Likewise, Dahal (2005:56) has also outlined the problems of the Nepalese migrant workers in Malaysia and Gulf countries in his study. He underscores the problems like wages to the labourers and job as not promised, the lack of recreational activities and the problems related to accommodation, culture shock and religious difference as well as the problem of maltreatment. Khanal, et.al. (2010) in their study, raise some issues about the recruiting procedures and the role of the remittance in the households and country while focusing about Malaysia and other Gulf countries. Here, buttressing the positive role played by the foreign employment, the report advises the government institutions for systematizing the manpower so that the middlemen do not cheat the migrants. The report goes on to advise the concerned authorities for recurring problems related to wages, accommodation, deception of the company regarding the nature of job etc.

Along with the studies on the overall labour migration from Nepal to the Gulf, there have been some studies on the women labour migration on the Gulf region too. One of the studies digs into the general socio-economic problems they face after they return home from the foreign employment too. For instance, the migrant women, after returning, face many social problems like violence, desertion and marital stress, which need to be managed by the collective effort of civil society and the state (SAARC, 2006). 14 percent of them report of their husbands living with other women and 6 percent of them have reported of the mental tension in their families (Adhikari, et. al. 2006). Some of the returnee migrant women also find the money sent by them to have been misused by their husbands. These husbands at home enjoy their hard -earned remittances (ibid).

Though the migrant workers' role in the economy of the destination country is vital, this fact has been acknowledged by these countries very late and gradually their rights have been also begun to be acknowledged after the much efforts put by the human rights activists. One such study carried out by a women-right based organisation in Nepal discusses some of the major human right violations the women migrant workers face in the destination countries in spite of their contribution in the economy of the host country (Bhadra, 2007). These workers face the human right violations like exploitation, forced labor, sexual abuse, underpayment, excessive work, denial of access to health education and justice and work place discrimination. The women migrant workers in domestic and informal sectors particularly face these problems. Many of these human right violations against them happen due to their lack of awareness on their rights and process of foreign employment (WOREC, et.al. 2011).

Ranging from the gulf countries to Malaysia and South Korea, we see the problems faced by the migrant Nepalese people. These problems range from very serious to less serious and manageable ones. Nepal and South Korea signed a Memorandum of Understanding(MOU) on EPS<sup>6</sup> to formally hire the Nepalese workers in South Korea. I have discussed in detail about it in the chapter four. It formally paved the way for Nepalese men and women to go and work in South Korea.

Apart from the studies based on Nepalese migrant workers in Gulf countries, there have been some studies that focus on the working scenario of Nepalese workers in South Korea. In this

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<sup>6</sup> Employment Permit System. The formal way of hiring Nepalese workers by the South Korean Companies and farms

context, Bhattraï (2005) in her study finds a difficult life of the Nepalese workers In South Korea. She states that the Nepalese workers do the dirty, difficult and dangerous (3-D) <sup>7</sup> works along with the entire immigrant workers. She further states that the Nepalese labourers are spending their youth in South Korea but are getting lower wages than South Koreans, working for longer hours and sometimes facing the misbehaves from the counterparts. The difficulty in the workplaces compels the workers to be illegal so that they can do whatever job they like. She further states that South Korea should implement the international norms values and acts not only pass them in paper. The contribution of the migrant workers should be acknowledged and good regulations should be practiced avoiding the illegalization of the foreign workers there. A study report has reflected the data regarding the causes and remedies for the suicides being committed in a high degree in South Korea. The study has tried to study the cases and have suggested many things for the mental health and overall condition of the migrants (Nepal Embassy, South Korea, 2013).

It has been elucidated some issues\problems related to emigrant women in South Korea in still another study. The need of prevention and special attention to the women marriage migrants <sup>8</sup>; the need of national attention to the issue of migrant workers like the issue of pension which they are denied; the lack of social security including pregnancy, paternity and maternity leave; companies disowning and denial in the visa matter; the difficulty in shifting the job and long working hours as well as problematic living condition. But, the embassy reiterated the fact that the migrant workers are treated according to contract and they needed to compromise as it was made clear in the beginning about the possible hardships (National Human Rights Commission Nepal, 2013:8-11).

As discussed above, most of the studies pertaining to migrant workers from Nepal have been directed to gulf countries. Since, South Korea is a new employment destination for the Nepalese people, there have been fewer studies on the Nepalese labour migration and very less study about the women labourers. On the other hand, I found most of the studies focussing on the negative aspects keeping the positives aspects aside, though there are also some positive aspects of the migration, too. So, here, drawing and departing from the previous studies, I am inclined to present the overall experiences (both the positive and the negative) of the women labourers like their empowerment and the challenges on their way. My research questions are about how they have

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<sup>7</sup> 3D means dirty, difficult and dangerous.

<sup>8</sup> The women who came to Korea marrying the Korean men.



been working there and being self-reliant, what are the problems and challenges (if any) on the ways of most of these women and how are they coping with them.

I have analysed these experiences of Nepalese migrant women workers through the lens of gender, structural violence and empowerment. First, I have talked about the gender and the patriarchy as well as the trend of migration in Nepalese society and women migration in South Korea. Then, I have linked that to my theories of gender, structural violence and empowerment.

### **1.2.1. My take on the issue, Objective, Scope of my Project and its limitation**

Employment in South Korea has given a better income opportunity as compared to the other traditional destinations like some of the gulf countries and has highly boosted the Nepalese economy. In the age of equality and empowerment, women are also equally participating in income generating activities. Nepalese women workers too have benefitted much from there. They have been empowered and acting on their own for their future. Their socio-economic status has been improved. But still, their journey to empowerment and participation is not as smooth as we may think. Some of the problems they face in their journey may be common to all migrant workers, while some may be specific to their gender. So, my research tries to show the both aspects-positive as well as negative ones- as it is there.

In this research work, the Nepalese women despite the patriarchal societal set up, have been to the foreign employment due to several push and pull factors that I have discussed in the chapter four while drawing the everyday Nepalese life and causes behind the foreign employment. This aspect has also been discussed under the analysis chapter while giving the causes and impacts of the Nepalese women's migration to South Korea.

There is an interconnection between the concepts of gender and patriarchy. In its literal meaning, gender stands for the cultural construction of the biological sexes (Cornell, 2010:10). Gender is a combination of the socially and culturally constructed roles assigned to two sexes and is learned, changes over time and varies widely across the cultures whereas sex is a biological feature that is determined by the genetic characteristics (Espen and Jolly, 2006:3).

Our mainstream patriarchal culture has different values in practice, among which gender discrimination is one.

Here, to discuss on the issue of structural violence, I have referred to the theorists like John Galtung (1990), Cathleen Ho (2007), Lorber (2010) and Samantroy (2010).

Galtung (1990) has been a prominent figure in presenting the concept of structural violence. Moreover, I have used other theorists like Ho (2007) regarding her studies of structure and structural violence; Lorber (2010) for her studies on how “gender” is structural and leads to structural violence and Samantroy (2010) for her studies of structural violence regarding the gender construct in the patriarchal societies. Galtung (1990:294) states that the structural violence is a cultural violence as it originates from discriminatory cultural practices in society. So, this exploitation and discrimination is supported by the culture as normal or natural in any specific society.

For Kabeer (2005:13), the empowerment refers to the process by which the people, who were denied such ability, acquire it to make strategic life choices. In other words, it is an expansion of one’s freedom of choice and actions, which increases one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions affecting life.

In Nepal, gender role is very dominant in the everyday life. The roles to be performed by men and women are already designed by the patriarchy. Because of this, the women have undergone unequal treatment and have been solely dependent on their males. But nowadays, they have begun to challenge these stereotypes and opted for the foreign employment for achieving empowered status. In this thesis, I have tried to relate the gender construct to the structural violence that the women have been suffering from. Despite the hurdles- structural violence originating from the gender roles, Nepalese women have ventured in foreign employment and have tried to redefine their roles.

I have worked as a Peace Officer in Peace and Conflict of the Nepal government. That time, I came in the contact with all kinds of people and sects. I had also some chances of studying the theories of gender and empowerment in my study at graduate level and as I was curious to learn more, I am pursuing my master’s degree in Peace and Conflict studies here at University of Tromsø. I have well known about emigrant Nepalese workers especially women facing various experiences in different foreign countries. Among these issues, the case related the Nepalese emigrant women workers in South Korea drew my attention as it has been one of the most popular

employment destinations in the recent days. Though South Korea has been considered as a better place for women workers as compared to other destinations, here too, I have come across some of the problems.

As an emigrant female student, I have got a chance of conducting a research under the subject of Peace and Conflict Transformation in the University of Tromsø. I decided to research on the experiences of Nepalese emigrant women workers in South Korea as there has not been much study on the subject matter. The primary objective of this research is to show their experiences of all sorts and to show how they are coping with them while earning and being socio-economically stronger.

One of the challenges that I encountered with was the time difference between South Korea and Norway. Because of this, I had to spend much time for contacting them. I have discussed this fact in the Methodology chapter. Also, the help of my friend in connecting my respondents is also a very important one. Due to the unfavourable circumstances, and limitations, I physically could not make it there and I had to take help of Skype interviews. In this regard, the role of present information and communication technology has been very important.

Furthermore, my insider status in terms of gender, culture and age could impact the interview with my subjectivity, which I have discussed in the Methodology chapter. On the other hand, my outsider status as 'a student', was also a limitation of the study. Therefore, I had to apply balanced parameters during the study period, which itself was very challenging, I have discussed these limitations and challenges in detail in the Methodology chapter.

### **1.3. Outline of the Thesis**

This research work has been divided into six chapters. The very first chapter deals with the brief discussion of the research topic. In the second chapter, there is an attempt to highlight the methodology employed during the study. The third chapter outlines the conceptual framework employed in the study of the present issue. Moreover, in the fourth chapter, the background of the Nepalese society, the general status of Nepalese women and the state of their empowerment has been explained. In the fifth chapter, there is the interpretation and analysis of text and presentation of the findings. In the same way, the sixth chapter draws the conclusion of my research and its findings.



## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

This chapter focuses on the methodological framework employed for this study. Here, I have discussed about the kinds of research methods I have applied and why I chose those methods. I have also talked about the ethical parameters and challenges during the study. It starts with the background of the study area and descends to the idea of how I could gain the access to my informants and how I selected them and their size. Then it goes on to delve in to the issue of the kinds, ways and process of data collection techniques. It, then, reflects on the experiences along with shedding light on the ethical standards that were maintained during this study. It also unfolds the challenges and limitation encountered on the way. At last, with some of the personal evaluations of the field experience, it summarizes the chapter.

### **2.1. Selection of the Study Area**

The study area was Nepal and South Korea-Nepal being the source country from where the workingwomen come from and South Korea being the target country where they have been working now. I had conducted the semi-structured method of interview during my fieldwork. I conducted the interviews in Nepal from 19 August 2014 to 10 September 2014. I interviewed them in the capital city of Kathmandu. I stayed 3 weeks in Nepal. It took me almost 3 months to get in contact with all my respondents in South Korea. My interviews were based on the Nepalese migrant women who work in and around Dongdaemun-gu; a commercial district that lies to the north side of Han River<sup>9</sup> and is the eastern gate of the capital Seoul. It is the home to museums, palaces, notable companies and firms as well as various colleges and universities. My fieldwork site Dongdaemun is famous as a special tourism zone consisting of the markets places, companies and firms<sup>10</sup>. I conducted the interviews with the Nepalese women involved in agriculture firms and some industries like animal husbandry, textiles etc.

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<sup>9</sup> A very famous river in central South Korea.

<sup>10</sup> Dongdaemun-gu (district) is one of the twenty-five districts in Seoul. As it is in the east side of the Seoul, it is also called to be the eastern gate of the capital Seoul that has a population of 370,00 and has covered the 14.22 km<sup>2</sup> (2.35% of Seoul's area).

## **2.2. Gaining Access to and the size as well as selection of the informants:**

In order to collect essential data, I conducted sixteen interviews and seven of the interviews were conducted with the working women in South Korea through Skype. The age interval was between twenty-five to thirty-eight, as most of the respondent's working age was within this age group. Similarly, I conducted three interviews -one with the returnee, other with an incumbent worker who had come to Nepal on her holiday and one more with one of the family members of these women, whom I contacted in Nepal. Six others were conducted with the government officials and concerned people in the field in South Korea. The family member and other six respondents had a slightly higher age (40-45) than the immigrant working women. Among the six interviews, the first one was with a women social worker in South Korea-the then president of Nepalese Social Organization Women for Women<sup>11</sup>, another with a businesswoman- turned migrant Nepalese woman. The third one was with the labour attaché (deployed on behalf of the ministry of Labour, Nepal Government) in the Nepalese Embassy in South Korea and another was with the deputy head of the Nepalese Embassy in South Korea. Moreover, the fifth one was conducted with a Nepalese journalist writing about the issues of the Nepalese women in South Korea and the very last one with a woman student leader who has been helping the Nepalese women since long (she is also affiliated to the Nepalese Students organization-SONSIK)<sup>12</sup>

The Skype interviews were conducted along with three direct interviews with two women and a family member in Nepal to include all the voices from different angles. The experience of direct interview was different from that of the interview through the Skype. While interviewing the respondents face to face, I felt that they were more open as they had seen me live on Skype. They were frank enough and told their experiences in detail. The Skype interviews were shorter and more formal than the direct ones, though the respondents were engaged and told their experiences frankly, too. Gaining access has been one of the most important things that also impact the quality of the research. A researcher can have a very easy access to the informants if he/she is introduced by the people who are already inside the community, particularly in the sensitive research. My

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<sup>11</sup> Women for Women is one of the Nepali social organizations in South Korea (as there are number of right -based , ethnicity based , geography based and politics based Nepali organizations and groups sometimes acting as pressure groups) which was established by Nepali entrepreneur women for helping the exploited women in the Korean society- be they women from Nepal married to Korean men and latter had some problems or be they working women in industry and agriculture who needed help (food, shelter and Legal treatment too).

<sup>12</sup> The full form of SONSIK is the society of Nepalese Students in Korea, which is a group of Nepali Students in Korea. This group has been registered in Korea and also helps the Nepali there.



friend there in South Korea, who already knew my informants, helped me a lot in accessing them. My friend used to work with some respondents and he introduced them to me.

I also used “the social networks which play a crucial role in gaining access” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:59). Likewise, I also used snowball-sampling method and accessed all the people there from the workers to the government officials after contacting some of the informants at first. As Bryman (2012:202) puts, in this technique, the researcher establishes the initial contacts with a small group of people who are relevant to the research and through them accesses or contacts the others.

There is almost 8 hours difference between Norway and South Korea and my respondents in South Korea used to go to work either early in the morning at around eight in the morning and come back in the evening or go to work at around ten at night and come back in the morning. Because they came very tired from their workplaces and worked almost for six days (they were free only on Sunday), it was very difficult to manage time for the interviews. That’s why it took three months to be done with the interviews. I did not choose very big size of the informants but chose the diverse one, though my subject matter is quite broad. For some scholars, small number is not enough to produce statistically representative samples (Kuosmanen, 2013: 26). Whereas I think in qualitative research method, my sixteen interviews are enough for a quality result. Some other scholars state that the limited number of the informants guarantee the quality and is not lost in generalization (Onwuegbuzi & Leech, 2007:242). The interviews with the various people helped me draw the balanced picture as far as possible. Furthermore, this was really a new experience in the research where I could share the experience with the people who were not normally reachable. This was only possible due to the help of information technology.

### **2.3. Data Collection**

There are two types of data collection method. As Marshall (1996) puts, between the two types- qualitative and quantitative researches- the type is determined by the research question and its linkage to the research issue. Qualitative research method may be employed when the researcher wants to research on the life histories of the people ranging from the private like the household activities to the public activities in the office (Silverman 2005: 6). On the other hand, in quantitative research, there is no interpretation of the people’s actual behaviour as it is related to the social survey research (Bryman, 2012: 620).

Here, I have used the qualitative research methodology to explore their everyday experiences. I could have only showed the current data on their number, through the quantitative method, but as I want to show how they are living there, I selected qualitative research methodology for the major data collection procedure. The qualitative method has also been employed for the data collection as it practically understands and has the explanation of the different phenomenon in their natural setting. (Nabyinada, 2014:26).

As secondary and primary data collection methods are the major ways of data collection in qualitative research methodology, I have used both methods. In primary data collection method, I have chosen the interview method and particularly semi structured interview and document review as a secondary method.

### **2.3.1. The interviews: how they were sampled and why**

In semi-structured interview, there are series of open-ended questions, which are helpful for the discussion of the topic in more detail and help the respondents give the original responses (Hancock, 1998). I used this type of interview, because I thought that my motive of getting the answers to all my questions in detail and in a conversational manner could be materialized only after that. I also chose it to keep the interview within a set parameter avoiding the possible digression and deviation from the research questions as well as to make it spontaneous and realistic. This means as the interview can start in any point and take any format and can have the elements of spontaneity, but still it must be structured somehow so that it answers the research questions well.

I had planned to use the unstructured interview, thinking that it is freer and conversational with my informants and is more suitable while informally interviewing through the Skype. But as it lacked the points in between the conversations, it digressed from the topic, making it more unstructured when I tried this in one of my interviews. So, I made a list of the questions to be centered around, and this helped me to remain within the areas of my research questions. This is the reason of my choice of the semi-structured method of interview.

Moreover, the use of semi-structured method of the interview was helpful to pivot around their experiences and role. If I had not employed this method, my interview would have digressed

from the ethos of the research questions. On the other hand, it was quite conversational and free and did not give a feeling that we are in formal question answer session. I asked open-ended questions to all the respondents ranging from the immigrant women to the government officials, journalist and social worker as well as a family member. The conversations with them were centered on the issue and answered my research questions, though they seemed to be quite informal and without any structure. Through these interviews, I could get ideas about their gender roles, issue of the agency and the status of their empowerment, which came along with their voices and experiences.

I employed the semi-structured interview guide to explore the voices and experiences of the informants. There were altogether thirty questions at my disposal among them 15 were for the women workers and other fifteen were divided between other respondents. As I used Skype for the primary data collection medium, my interview guide helped me to be centered on the topic and drove off the possible digression, which occurred time and again during the interview session.

The questions were about their diverse experiences, their power relation in the workplace in terms of their gender and agency, difference in their status (past and present), the role of the government in these, the challenges the social workers had to face regarding the working women, how did they solve it, the issues in the field that the journalist encountered, the experience and impact to the family member and their opinion on it etc. Though all the questions were asked, they did not follow the exact way that was outlined in the interview guide.

While interviewing the respondents, there were plenty of instances where the challenges of being too emotional and difficulty in developing the rapport occurred, and, I solved the challenges being centered around my prime motto- I was collecting the data for the sake of research work. However, my plan to go to South Korea was hindered because of my personal problems and health issues.

### **2.3.2. Document Review**

Though, I found some of the studies and reports on the Nepalese Immigrants and Nepalese women immigrants generally, I could not find any study on my topic particularly. Because of this, I could use very few government reports and had to refer to newspaper articles and news. The kinds of mass media are some national newspapers, journal and periodicals; some other are Nepalese online newspaper that get published from South Korea. I have also collected the data and information through the reports and studies of (I) NGOs, international Organizations and other groups.

There are two types of the analysis – analysis of documents and the analysis of the data gathered from the field itself. We, as researcher analyse the wide range of documents like personal documents, official documents and information from the mass media, visual outputs etc. for having a solid knowledge of the phenomena under discussion (Bryman, 2001). Through it, he/she can gather knowledge on the customs and the norms as well as the historical background in relation to the government institution and the environment they live in. The researcher can prepare himself or herself on the context and the issue under discussion and get the foundation for primary data collection by the careful analysis of the documents like the official documents produced by government organizations, non- profit organizations and private sectors, mass media outputs and the previous researches (Edwards and Skinner, 2009).

I also studied the newspaper articles government reports, reports from other informal sectors for knowing the issue in detail –whether written or visual. This study of the context helped me a lot during my interview sessions with my informants. Also, in analyzing and interpreting the data gathered from the field, we need to be very cautious on the ethos of the informants, so I have been very much careful in this regard and have put what was there in the field.

## **2.4. The field: From Challenges to Ethical Issues**

### **2.4.1. Challenges, limitations and access**

As we can access the people directly and know their actual feelings, emotions and the experiences, the interviewees can answer freely where they are unhesitant to respond (Silverman 2010). As we can get highest possible reliable data through the face-to-face interview, we can avoid the possibility of getting a wrong information in this method. Along with the flexible

questioning and answering, it can incorporate a large range of the useful topics and issues for the research focusing specific fields and reconstructing the events (Bryman, 2001).

The superb personality of a researcher plays a very pivotal role in an interview. The knowledge of the local language and the skills of framing do a lot in this course. This way, he or she can find a reliable and trustworthy data and avoid the chances of getting the wrong and misleading information which sometimes may occur in the research field when some of the respondents are there who undergo the unwillingness and uncomfortableness in sharing their experiences (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). In the same way, when I was conducting the interviews, I had to face many challenges. Sometimes the interviewees were unwilling and even if ready, I felt that they hid some of their experiences. I could guess it through their tone and way of expression and as I had some prior study on the topic and some other interviews too. Sometimes the interviews digressed and incorporated within them on unexpected and unrelated topics and took more time than planned. As Bryman (2001) has it that along with being very time-consuming method, sometimes it is difficult to fix the time for the interviews, I have expressed this experience in detail above under the topic related to the size selection and the access to the informants.

I also faced the challenges in using the newspaper articles on the topic. Sometimes, I faced these difficulties in proper referencing as they sometimes lacked the detailed link I wanted as the requirement of the thesis.

Likewise, I could not go to South Korea in the stipulated time and had to take help of Skype interviews for primary data collection. The Nepal Embassy in South Korea did a great help by arranging two interviews and providing very useful data and information and contact numbers as well. My choice of snowball sampling method worked a great deal as I had to use my networks with them for reaching other informants. There is not enough study in my topic especially on the women migrant workers in South Korea, so I had to rely much on newspaper articles.

I gave the assurance of confidentiality and privacy as they wanted to know where and how I was going to use their information. I assured them that it was for a solely academic purpose and I would destroy all the information after using it safely. I have also done as promised to them. I had to take help of the Embassy, members of the social organizations, my friends, as well as journalists because of the unfamiliarity with the migrant Nepali women of the study area. I have

also discussed above that it was difficult to reach them while at work and even when they returned homes, because of the difference in time zones.

Likewise, I had to conduct all the interviews in Nepalese language and some of the secondary materials are also in Nepali. I translated them as I am writing this research paper in English language. As far as possible, I have been extra careful while translating not to kill the ethos of those written materials and interviews.

#### **2.4.2. Ethical Considerations**

Ethics is a set of moral and professional behaviors that make research accountable collect valid data for the research and takes in account the respect to the research subjects while publishing our findings (Bagele, 2012). Ethics plays a very important role in research by providing respect to the subject and minimizing the research disaster by controlling the unlimited power of the researcher (Baker, 1999). We have two kinds of locational status in any research –insider and outsider. Insider research is a kind of research where the researcher comes from the same community on which his or her research is based (Kanuha, 2000). In this kind of research, the researcher shares the identity, language and experience of the participants (Asselin, 2003).

On the other hand, in the research where the researchers belong to a different social groups, ethnicity, class and gender and the researcher has no prior knowledge of the people he or she is reaching about, and the researcher accumulates the information from the previous literature and the experiences of the other researchers. For instance, men are viewed as the outsiders to women (Hellawell, 2006). The insider researchers cannot receive all the needed information due to their insider status, as the proponents of the outsider research argue (Rabe, 2003:156). The reason behind is that the insider researchers, because of their cultural norms and values, cannot ask certain questions whereas the outsider researchers can ask these questions easily and collect the necessary data (Rabe, 2003:157). Likewise, the insider researchers may miss the information in a context where outsider researchers look the things with new eyes possibly because of the cultural blindness (ibid).

However, some other scholars see the problem in this division of the insider and outsider and state that these two positions are not static or fixed and rather they are ever shifting and differently perceived and expressed by the community members under research (Naples, 1996:84). For



Dwyer and Buckle (2009), during the research course, the researcher equally plays both roles- an insider as well as outsider. Their opinion is that, the researcher is a dominant player during the different process of interactions like face-to-face interview, audio-visual recording, and direct observation as well as in mapping the networks, time and spaces. Here, during the research process the very personal qualities of a human being are silent. Rather, the ethnographer's social and presentation skills as well as behavior hugely impact the setting of the research and access to the informants (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). So, during the research activity as Hinnells (2005) states that to some extent, we can see the same person as having the insider and outsider qualities at the same time.

During my research too, I have been very much careful to adopt the parameter of the research ethics every now and then. The issues like the prior informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and privacy of the research subject, anonymity etc. taking in to consideration that ethics prevails in every step of the research. I did not hide my personality with them during the field visit to Nepal and interview sessions in South Korea. I was careful in every step from gaining their consent and approval, respecting them and putting their voices exactly as far as possible. I had already disclosed my actual motive for conducting interview that I was collecting data for my academic research work. I also assured them they are free not to give interview and they can leave the conversation at any time if they felt to do so.

While collecting the data, my women informants and I had many things in common that gave me the feeling of an insider. We had a common feeling of national, linguistic, cultural, values and gender related (as a female) as well as being expatriates etc, so I felt as If I was one of them. With the other informants, I had shared language and cultural values too. These are the aspects that gave me the feeling of being insider during the interview sessions.

Regarding the outsider aspects, my status as a student my age and my economic background to some extent were there every time that helped me a lot to be neutral as far as possible. I was an international student and had a different economic status unlike them as they were foreign labourers in Korea and had certain code of conduct and limitations because of their status. I was much younger than them as most of them were above thirty and I was under thirty and in this regard, we had a difference. Likewise, I was doing a research for the requirement of my academics and was different from them regarding our motives. I also maintained my fair and

balanced personality during data collection by controlling my personal feelings towards them due to my friendly behaviour, during interview.

## **2.5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the methodological framework adopted in the research. The thirteen interviews were conducted in South Korea and rest three interviews were conducted in Nepal.

I had used the qualitative method of research and under it particularly the semi-structured interview with the informants to avoid the possible digression as we be inside the structure though a semi –one. I used snowball sampling and used my networks for it. The interviews in Nepal were taken in between 19 August 2014 to 10 September 2014 in Kathmandu and the interviews in South Korea were conducted between June 2014 to August 2014 in Dongdaemun. I have collected other information using the secondary method.

Likewise, the informants were taken from 25 to 38 years age interval. Other than the workingwomen, rest of the informants were up to the age of forty. I have also discussed about the challenges and limitations as well as the issue of reflexivity, insider and outsider and other ethical concerns and how I handled them

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Concepts**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter attempts to present the conceptual framework for the analysis of the experiences of the emigrant Nepalese female workers in South Korea. It looks at the concept of gender as societal construction of patriarchy. For understanding the women's identity and their agency and exercise of their choices, the notion of patriarchy and its manifestation is vital. To underscore the informants' experiences in a foreign land and its effect in their lives, my study looks upon the concept of empowerment through its tripartite dimensions of agency, critical consciousness and identity. These dimensions of empowerment are interconnected and interwoven.

For studying the impact of foreign employment in the empowerment of these women in a foreign land, it is imperative to include the gender perspectives and resultant structural violence. My point here is, to show how at both places -home and abroad-the gender inequalities work in a patriarchal setting and how these women face them and achieve their empowerment despite these obstacles. At home, they suffer/ed at the hand of patriarchy and were/are compelled to be within the set boundary of patriarchal norms. When they have come to a foreign land, these gender inequalities persist and they also have been undergoing the structural violence resulting from these gender roles and foreign employment as a whole. Despite these, they have been working and are able to pave a way for their self-reliance and identity.

From the very start of the project, it has been very clear to me that these women, despite the gender inequalities at home and abroad, have been able to empower themselves socially and economically. While at home, they had to live and exercise their agency within the walls created by the patriarchal set-up. They were and are subordinate to their male members in the families; they had to compromise in their education and career for the family; they had to fulfil the expectations of the families by being good daughters, wives, daughter-in-law's and mothers. They had to run their families according to the rules set by their husbands. They had limited choices and their decision power was curtailed. After they left their homes, they were in an unknown land with their new identity and agency. Now, even in a foreign land they have similar gender discrimination. They sometimes undergo problems related to adaptation, stresses-mental and physical ones and harassments, abuse and exploitation etc. Despite these problems, they have been able to pave a way to their empowerment through the respectable earning that they send

back home as remittance. They have also boosted self-confidence and reliance because of this socio-economic achievement.

### **3.2. Gender and Patriarchy**

The gender is the construction of patriarchy where every woman is a subordinate to the man and the men dominate, oppress and exploit the women under this system and practices (Johansdottir, 2009:1). In this system as some feminists argue, the patriarchy systematizes the physical, social and economic power over the women and subordinates her (Reeve and Baden, 2000: 28). Men's and women's roles and responsibilities are defined by these gender values which ultimately have an influence over the access and control of the resources and participation in decision making (Reeve and Baden, 2000:4).

Cranny-Francis (2003:2) explores about the historicity of this representation even up to the classical Greek era where she finds Aristotle giving "Pythagorean table of opposites" in attributing masculinity with positive and femininity with negative shades of meaning. She further comments that "Aristotle took his curious set of binary oppositions even further in his *Economics* where he states that men were stronger, women weaker, men courageous, women cautious, men the outdoors type, women domestic, men educate children, women nurture them".

Cranny-Francis (2003 :3) further states "gender is not simply the gender one is, that is a man or a woman, but rather a set of meanings that sexes assume in particular societies". The operation of gender in our society takes up these sets of meanings, organizes them as masculinity or femininity and matches or lines them up with male and female bodies. "For some theorists, gender and sex are overlapping constructs that differ in emphasis, where our understanding of biological sex is likely to be shaped by our culture's notion of gender.

Widespread violation of gender norms by a woman constitutes a serious threat to the entire gender system. It is thus not surprising that a woman is stigmatized and labelled deviant when her behaviours challenge traditional gender norms (Blinde and Taub, 1992 :551). Moreover Blinde and Taub (1992: 552) further explains that this labelling is particularly indicative of women who violate multiple categories of gender norms like presentation of self, marriage and maternity, sexuality and sexual behaviour and occupational choice.

In this way, the Nepalese emigrant women workers in South Korea as a result, on the one hand, had been undergoing the gender inequality at home, where they become "housewives", "caretaker", "nurturer" etc to patriarchy and further, even after leaving their families back, they have been undergoing similar experiences of violence and exploitation because of their gender.

### **3.3 Structural violence**

I want to relate the idea of gender and structural violence and show that despite these problems, the Nepalese emigrant women workers in South Korea have achieved their socio-economic empowerment. As workers in a foreign land, either they are male or female, they undergo certain kinds of exploitation and this exploitation is more if they are women. Even though the positive sides outweigh the negative sides, we cannot ignore these negative aspects while showing the experiences of these women as they are. So, I have talked about the structural violence and its concept and have tried to relate it with the gender of my respondents.

Before discussing the issue of structural violence, it is important to know what it is and how it initiates. For the analysis of structural violence, the structure is the first thing that is important (Ho, 2007). Ho (2007:2) quotes Landman that the structures and institution are at the pivot in structuralism and it underscores the holistic aspects of society where the independent relationships among the individuals, groups and institutions or organizations fall. Here, the sexism, racism and class-based structures are the Social structures whereas domestic financial institutions like business organizations make the economic structures (ibid). Galtung (1990:293) states that the structural violence originates while a particular group of people who are the top dogs discriminate and exploit another group of people in a society who are the underdogs and the former get much more out of the interaction in the structure than the latter. The underdogs face permanent and undesired conditions of malnutrition, starvation and diseases, and have shorter life expectancy due to the exploitation and marginalization of the over dogs (ibid).

There is inequality and growing disparity between the rich and the poor in the world system. In this system, the rich are getting richer and the poor the poorer. The fundamental inequality initiates the multidimensional forms of structural violence and this violence are seen in the forms of economic and social inequalities (Ho, 2007: 4 -5). Farmer (2005 quoted in Ho, 2007) as saying that the structural violence are the consequences of human agency which are implicated through the structures that reflect an unequal power distribution and are not the result of an accident.

Similarly, Samantroy (2010) states that the husbands' domination upon wives and their use of violence is sanctioned by the culture where it is considered to be normal and a prerogative of men. This can be a corrupting thing that can have harmful consequences for women. The gender is a social construct and this discrimination is also supported by the patriarchal culture as a natural thing. This gender perception increases the hardships of these women even in a foreign land like South Korea. Thus, Lorber (2010:10) puts that the gender inequality is not the result of personal aspects and choices but it is structural as the gender reform feminists opine. Lorber (2010:7) further clarifies that this inequality has its foundation on the gendered social order as women and men are treated differently and both have significant different life chances. In this way, for him (2010:10) the low-paid work for women, underestimation of their work, discriminatory access to education, health care and political power create these structural factors.

As there are some examples of exploitation and discrimination back home and at the foreign destination where the Nepalese immigrant women work, the structural violence is relevant to discuss. Nepal is a patriarchal society and women are leading subordinate lives over there and there is a certain amount of structural violence which they undergo on their everyday life due to their gender. They have limited access to education and political representation. They also have a curtailed decision-making power and so on and so forth. In the same way, they have been working in South Korea and all the workers face some kinds of structural violence there and the amount of the structural violence is more to them as they are female workers. There the majority of the co-workers and factories owners are male. For instance, there are the cases of physical and mental harassment, exploitation and abuses, which are also part of structural violence.

### **3.4. The concept of Empowerment and women Empowerment**

I, first, talked about the gender and patriarchy and connected the topic to the theories of structural violence, which could be useful while talking about the hurdles the Nepalese women in South Korea are undergoing. After this, now, I have come to the positive side of the foreign employment. To show these benefits, the theories of empowerment are relevant. I have first presented the concept of empowerment in general with its features and consequences. After that, I have come to the another idea of my project -women empowerment its concepts, features consequences. At last, I have talked about its tenets in detail and have showed some of the problems on the way to achieving the women empowerment.



Empowerment is, influencing the wellbeing of the people by granting the voice to them who otherwise are assumed to have been muted (Narayan, 2006:272). Empowerment assists the people in realizing their own inner potentialities and exercising them for their own and other's welfare. Empowerment can be at all levels-individual and collective and can be economic, political and social which are interrelated (World Bank, 2002:10). Empowerment is a relative process that enhances the capabilities of an individual, group and community as a whole (Pandey, 2014:19).

UNDP (1995:1) in its development perspective, perceives the empowerment to be the participation of the people in development and the distribution of its benefits. In recent times, the concept of empowerment has been a buzz phrase in relation to the development of the disadvantaged women of the society who have encountered the obstacles of violence against them and discrimination towards their gender (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). The rules and regulations of the society which legitimize the voice of the women, are the issues that are related to these dimensions of women empowerment (Mosedale, 2005:250). United Nations (2010:5) also has gender equality and women empowerment as one of the targets of Millenium Development Goals.

Kabeer (1999) has it that only with their strategic life choices with their own abilities which they could not get in past, there comes women's empowerment. Women, after getting control of resources-material and intellectual- can stand against the ideology and gender based discrimination of patriarchy. For the sustainable development with a transparent and accountable government, the empowerment and better socio-political and economic condition of women is a necessary condition. By working collectively, the women can gain something more. This collective action is the power of these women (Mosedale (2005:250).

Furthermore, once a woman gets education, not only herself, she transfers it to the future generations. Those educated mothers can infuse the self-esteem in their daughters as well so that they can consider of pursuing the non-conventional career paths (Stromquist 1997). Furthermore, UNDP (2014) has buttressed the five-point agenda where there are legal reforms, better employment opportunity for women, a minimum of 30% of women representation in politics and decision-making spaces, universal female education, improved reproductive health care, increased credit facilities and increased national and international support programmes for giving the women more eco-political chances.

Various scholars have suggested their distinct focus on the ways to empowerment. Here, I have focused the model of empowerment as suggested by Carr (2003:12-13) that is about the three dimensions of critical consciousness, agency and identity.

For Kabeer (1999:438), agency is the ability of a person to work accordingly by determining the goal and motivation. It incorporates the person's ability to make choices and transfers them in desired actions where social structures like norms and values, belief and laws work in a constant relation with social agents. It is also the capacity of a person to define his or her goals and act on them (Kabeer, 2001:21). This is considered to be the central component of empowerment (Kabeer, 2005:14). We can see a direct relation of an individual's self-esteem, autonomy and self-efficacy to the empowerment (Fournillier, 2012).

Moreover, Kabeer (1999: 438) further goes on saying that agency can be exercised either individually or collectively. When we cannot make the individual actions pass, then the goals can be achieved collectively. For instance, if we cannot effectively work on the gender equality in the society where the cultural values work, our collective efforts can better transform the society. (Kabeer, 1999: 457). According to the stereotypes of gender, men are presented as perpetrators of social inequalities and women as victim but here both are treated as objects refusing the central role, agency and association as actors in the process (Mores & Clark, 2001: 4). The agency, for overcoming the structural barriers, must work for achieving certain self-defined objectives (Kuosmanen, 2013: 44–45).

We have our own choices, the choices that reflect other's expectations do not give us the capacity to control and shape our own lives and ultimately disempower us (Narayan, 2006:4). Likewise, the agency differs from the geographical religious and social context and it cannot be defined universally. For the true accentuation of the agency, we need to have our own choices from inside not conferring them from the outside world (Freir, 1974:4).

Furthermore, another dimension is critical consciousness. It has a critical reflections and critical action and, it shows how the individuals who were oppressed till today, read critically and act to change their social conditions (Diemer & Li, 2011: 1815). Critical consciousness is a process where the people move from the position of unquestioning acceptance to a critical view of the social order (Kabeer, 2001:25). This has been also defined as awakening by (World Bank,

2002:10), and has been central to the empowerment to various scholars. It is the critical analysis of that structural oppression based on social, economic and political conditions that limit a person's opportunities and increase the injustice.

Likewise, Diemer & Li (2011: 1815) further explain it to be the control on those socio-political conditions and the capacity to bring about the social change by participating in the individual or the collective social action. If a person has a critical consciousness he or she works as a subject and an agent of the social transformation by being able to adopt the reality in a reflexive way, by achieving the criticality of making choices and bring about the change instead of being mere an object. (Freire, 1974: 3-4). Kuosmanen (2013: 45) holds that critical conscious gives a person an awareness on one's own context. Similar to him Freire (1974: 3-4) also has it that it to be working in the world being aware of the own's context as an active reflective participant rather being a passive receiver. For Carr (2003:9), critical consciousness is the intensive reflection of an individual for the society and its change. Similarly, the marginalized groups need a critical consciousness for overcoming structural constraints on human agency (Diemer & Li, 2011: 1815). Despite the unpredictability of the times, it can act as agent of change, make the people aware and can play decisive role especially in transition and social change (Freire, 1974: 15-16).

The third component is identity that comes along with other two ideas of agency and critical consciousness. This is closely connected to agency and critical consciousness and even acts as the foundation to agency. This is one among the three in this discussion that leads to the empowerment (Staples, 1990:38). The concept of the gender, a social construction of being a man or woman shapes our identities. So, there is a connection between gender and identity (Kuosmanen, 2013: 40). Our sense of self-worth and knowledge about our deeds and ourselves is accessed by means of identity (O'Hagan, 2009:28). In other words, identity is the particular social context where we get ourselves as man or woman through our sense of self (Goddard, 2002:4).

The empowerment or disempowerment both are possible through the gender identity in a particular social context. It renders empowerment or disempowerment based on whether gender identity, encourages or discourages us to make our independent life choices (Kuosmanen, 2013: 46). Furthermore, even though the position of inequality and subordination, an individual internalizes his or her position in the social structure, if he or she accepts the idea of masculinity

and femininity that is gender identity (Kabeer, 2005: 14).

There is a close connection between the process of identity construction and critical consciousness (Kuosmanen, 2013: 46). The perception of the world around does not become different, rather people find new ways of defining themselves and their position by developing the critical consciousness within them (Diemer & Li, 2011: 1815).

In this way, these components of empowerment-agency, critical consciousness and identity come time and again while I have discussed and analyzed the Nepali working women in South Korean job market. These components are so much interconnected with each other that it is almost next to impossible to think and describe them separately while studying about the empowerment as a whole.

### **3.5. Chapter summary**

The above chapter attempts to outline the conceptual framework of the thesis. Firstly, in order to analyse the condition of Nepalese women back home and abroad, I introduced the concept of patriarchy and gender. As Nepal is clearly under a patriarchal system, the women there are living the life of subordinate. After coming to South Korea, they face exploitation and discrimination and structural violence as labourers and these problems multiply because of their gender. I have connected the concept of structural violence and gender. Further, I have talked about the concept of empowerment particularly the women empowerment to look at the empowered status of these women. Later on, the issues like how these women in a foreign land are earning and gaining the socio-economic empowerment in spite of the gender hurdles back home and at the workplace have been dealt with. I have also elaborated the concept of empowerment in its tripartite interrelated dimensions as presented by Carr (2003)-Agency, critical consciousness and identity.

## **Chapter 4: Background**

### **4.1. Nepal: Traditional society, recent major events (Civil war), the current situation and the gender situation**

ICIMOD (2014: 11) presents the fact that Nepal, a landlocked country situated between China and India harbors the most diverse ethnicities<sup>13</sup> where the population living in the mountains, hills and southern plains undergo the hardships due to its harsh geography and extreme climate. In the last 25 years, Nepal has been so unstable that it got the eleven different governments and a significant political transition with the decade –long armed conflict up to 2006, since the introduction of democracy in 1990. Along with this, other subsequent conflicts also played role in overshadowing the country’s economic issues. Majority of the population live in the rural part who lack the access to modern infrastructures and basic facilities though Nepal has taken a huge leap in reducing poverty, and inequalities related to socio-economic aspect in recent years. Despite this, majority of the rural population still lacks the access to education, health facilities, economic opportunities and discriminatory gender practices.

Giri (2014) states that, the conflict between the (CPN) Maoist and the then civilian government of Nepal started in February 1996 for overthrowing the feudal monarchical system. Due to this conflict, there was mass killing and destruction everywhere. That time, as he quotes INSEC (2006 :1) that more than thirteen thousand people lost their lives and more than 200,000 people were displaced that time. The major structural causes that led to this conflict for a decade were the absence of democracy in the country, societal and political discrimination, poverty, feudalism and the inequality.

Moreover, the armed conflict that started between the Nepalese government and the Maoist Party (CPN-M<sup>14</sup>) initiated as the Maoists took up arms for overthrowing the monarchical regime and establishing their Maoist republic (Ariño, 2008: 5). During the conflict, there was no acceleration in the productive side and the economy was ailing. People suffered from poverty, which was a large push factor behind the migration of Nepalese youths-male and females. Even after the war ended in 2006 (Giri, 2014), the transition has not been smooth and it is still there as of 2017.

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<sup>13</sup> In Nepal, according to the census 2011, there are 125 castes and ethnicities.

<sup>14</sup> Now there is a slight change in the acronym from CPN –Maoists to UCPN-Maoists after one of the Communist lines united with it.

There are also various a discrimination on the Nepalese women who migrate for bringing about the betterment to their families. There are various agents of discrimination against them and it first starts in their own families and spreads out to the state level. At first, the families do not take their foreign employment positively as they do not have freedom to choose their profession and be the breadwinners for their families. The society also does not trust their professional ability (Gurung, 2007).

Likewise, the women take the illegal routes to the gulf countries jeopardizing themselves legally and physically as it has been banned legally for the Nepalese women to go in domestic work since 1998. However, they go to these countries, as they have most of the employment opportunities here (Gurung, 2007). Here, we can see how the state becomes protectionist and patronizing and refuses to allow them to make their own decision for acting as independent agents (Adhikari et.al, 2006). This discrimination and exploitation goes much ahead as the recruiting agents unnecessarily question about irrelevant and their most personal issues as half of these women seek their assistance during their recruitment process (ibid).

Empowerment is the individual's acquisition of thinking and acting power in fulfilling their potentials as equal members of the society (DFID, 2000). In this regard, the voices of all the people including women must not only be heard, but listened to. Only women can be agents of change regarding their empowerment from the feminist point of view. Here, there is the definition of power in its relation to empowerment (Ibid). In Nepal, as it is a patriarchal one, the notion of power culturally is embedded in it: the supremacy and control of males on women in upholding the honor of the family that limits the life choices of women.

There is a focus in empowerment through the economic interventions for improving the economic conditions of the Nepalese women for example - through the employment, income generation, access to credit, rural development programs and policies. These programs have been introduced both by the government and non-government sectors where strengthening the women's economic status is integrated with education, provision of basic needs and services as well as reproductive health (Panda, 2000).

It is undeniable fact that women empowerment is one of the prerequisites in developing Nepal. Women empowerment and economic independence, welfare, efficiency and employment

equality etc. come out of the ownership and full control of women on their land (The Kathmandu Post, 2010). For this, the government of Nepal has favoured the sustainable empowerment of these women by favouring their right to property. There has been the abolition of fifty –six sexist discriminatory laws and creation of new ones. (ibid).

#### **4.2. Migration from Nepal**

Migration is also the result of the natural disasters. Because of this, they lose their cultivable lands and they migrate to the nearest cities and in Nepal's case India too in the search of work until their land comes to normalcy. Some also go to gulf countries by taking the loans through their strong social networks. (Gurung, 2004: 35).

Majority of the Nepalese migration up to 1980s was to India as both the countries share a long common boarder. But sudden oil boom of early 70s with the globalization opened the new places to Nepal too. This oil bloom had the major role in the economic migration to the Middle East from South Asia and other parts of the world. The foreign labour force was a necessary for the massive infrastructure and development projects with the sudden flow of finances into the economy of these gulf countries. (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2013/14).

In the same way, there was a need of the domestic helpers in the South East Asian countries with the then economic growth, of the 1980s because of which there were innumerable job opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed populations from the Third World countries (Bhattraai, 2005). First, the South Asian population sought for the employment opportunities mainly due to the poverty and lack of employment opportunities in their own home countries. Another reason for this migration was also due to the fact that the labour exporting countries had structural problems in employment generation as they were basically agrarian (ibid). The structural change and rapid economic growth in the Asian region expanded the demand of the labour rendering some countries like Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore the importers of the unskilled labourers (Chung, 2014).

Gurung (2004) states that Nepal has a long history of migration for about two hundred years. In these days, more men than women have been migrating to the foreign countries temporarily. Even before the well-known Recruitment of British –Indian Armies, Nepalese went to the foreign countries because of the excessive taxation, curve labour and the exploitations by the agencies of the state. This has been a very important source for the country's economy.

As the agricultural sector is not able to absorb the labour force due to its being weaker day by day and as the service and production sectors are not better, the technology equipped neighbouring countries overshadow us. Against this backdrop foreign labour migration is absorbing the labour force and maintaining the problems caused by unemployment and under-employment (ibid).

Though there has been some visible achievement in the field of poverty reduction after the political change of 1990s- restoration of multiparty democracy, Nepal still falls in the category of the least developed country with the population of millions in total (ADB, 2014). While still 25 percentage of the population lives under the poverty line, this rate is even more in the rural areas -35 percent- where the 80 percent of the population resides as compared to the 10 percent of the population living in the urban areas. Agriculture provides livelihood to more than 60 percent population and contributes 38 percent to the gross domestic product being the mainstay for the national economy (CBS Nepal, 2011). This has rendered high unemployment problem and we still cannot break the poverty trap in the lack of skill even though the active population is compelled to migrate to gulf and other foreign countries. (CBS Nepal, 2011).

#### **4.2.1. To the Gulf**

The trend of international migration of Nepalese people is rapidly increased globally in recent years, due to the development of information technology and increased connectivity between the people. Remittances from immigrant people have become one of the sources of income of people of developing country (Seddon, et.al 2007). The lack of employment and opportunities in our country is also fueling the trend of foreign labor migration.

The number of immigrant Nepali workers is increasing day by day and according to some other sources six million Nepali workers are estimated to have been living in the foreign countries for the work as the migration began from centuries (National Human Rights Commission, Nepal: 2013). Furthermore, it is easier to the middle-class people than the poorer to arrange for the money to go to the countries like Malaysia and Gulf, which is multiplying (Gurung, 2004: 34). The research of Williams, et.al (2010) focuses on the lives, works, values intentions and behaviours of the Migrant people who live in GCC<sup>15</sup>. It sheds light on the remittance and its

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<sup>15</sup> GCC is a group of the seven countries in the gulf which are heavy importers of foreign workers- Baharain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.



positive impact in the society; the future plan of the migrant workers on remigrating or not; the opinion of the respondents whether the aspects of modernity like hospital, doctors and television are good or not; and their beliefs on their home culture and values. In all the questions, asked by the researchers, here are positive answers of the respondents- on the foreign labour and their plan of remigration and their learning in a foreign land; on the 'modernity' like modern hospitals and other institutions and modern working style. They have a respect for their cultural values and institutions like marriage etc.

On the one hand, foreign labour migration is not devoid of the above discussed problems. There are some more problems like women trafficking, trafficking of the children, national labour shortages and the flow of the labourers from the neighbouring country India. This should be addressed by the appropriate policies of the government (Gurung, 2004:9). On the other, it has some benefits too as they have been discussed either in the above or will be discussed in the proceeding paragraphs like remittance, support in the sustainable development and poverty reduction, training and skill development etc. We should not forget the reality that everything has negative as well as positive sides. Foreign labour migration is no exception where we get to read and hear plenty of news of both kinds almost daily.

Gurung (2004), argues that women migrants are not allowed to go to the gulf countries till date. This is because of the bitter past experiences. Despite it, Nepalese women by paying a higher pay and facing risk, go to the gulf countries even though they may have difficult times at work there. For obtaining passport and the work-related documents, the women need the written permission of guardians or husband. Though it is not possible to go from here, they go to the gulf countries from India. They may travel up to there in the pretext of medical treatment or meeting the relatives and must of them go to the gulf countries via there (ibid).

There is no separate data of man and women labourers in foreign countries. Though the women are not allowed to work in the gulf countries, we can find through various sources that this trend has not stopped. The government has failed to stop these women from reaching the Gulf countries. The study revealed that that time the number of Nepalese women labourers in Gulf was around eight to ten thousand (UNIFEM/SAMANATA, 2002). These women workers mainly are domestic workers in the countries like India, the gulf countries, the US and the UK. But the government data dramatically underestimates the situation (Gurung, 2004: 29).

Women workers who go to abroad as domestic servant face many challenges including work vulnerability, sexual harassment and the mental torture. There are no bilateral agreements between the two governments and international conventions are not effectively implemented to protect the right of the women labourers in the foreign lands although Nepal has signed nine till date. Their insurance does not protect them; health facility is not accessible; they do not get provident fund; and there is no guarantee of wage and leave too. They are not protected by the insurance, have limited access of the health facility and have no guarantee on wage or leave (Gurung, 2004: 18).

The women in Golf Cooperation Council (GCC) especially UAE, are the “kafalla”<sup>16</sup> sponsorship system has placed the migrants and mostly women workers in indentured situations. In this system, the sponsor holds all their papers fixes piece work with several employers as well as charges them for the sponsorship. Because of this, the women there are isolated and face restriction in the movement. This even worsens, for example in Kuwait, the visas of these women are intentionally allowed to expire or the sponsors sell them to other employers as the breach the visa conditions, because of this these workers find them outside the law and their capacity to earn reasonable wages and send home back decreases. (ILO, 2004).

As the migration law, rather than the labour law is in predominant practice in many countries when it comes to the migrant workers, this has been particularly problematic for the female workers. While all the labourers including men and women have the low conditions and lower wages women labourers have more problems as they also undergo gender-specific violence-physical and sexual (ILO, 2004). Even further, the unequal pay between men and women further exacerbates the vulnerability of the women migrants. Even though the UAE has ratified the ILO convention on equal pay for the work of equal value between men and women workers, men housekeepers get more salary than their women counterparts (ILO,2004).

#### **4.2.2. Push and Pull Factors**

The push factors are those that compel people to leave that place for other destinations. For example, unemployment, underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, exhaustion of natural resources, natural calamities, etc. may compel people to

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<sup>16</sup> The Kaffala sponsorship system, in the oil States, establishes that each foreign labourer has to have a sponsor “ kafil”, holding the citizenship of the recruiting country (ILO, 2004).

leave their native place in search of better livelihood opportunities. In most developing countries like Nepal, the imbalance ratio between population and the opportunities is considered as a giant push factor for migration. The Nepalese people as a whole, because of the above-mentioned push factor, have been compelled for the foreign employment. By the same token, majority of the (women) informants had chosen foreign employment, as the life was (still is) hard in Nepal and the earning of their husband was (and still is) insufficient. The people are forced to migrate as the politics at home is chaotic and the economic condition, as a whole is crippled. An informant shares her problems that pushed her for the foreign employment. She states:

*Because of the need for money, I came to Korea. There is dirty politics at home and the leaders are giving the false promises and sending their children to foreign countries in the money of the government. We poor people suffered and had no money to send our children to good schools. We could not give them good food as we did not have enough money. As there used to be less money in my village, I came to Kathmandu to work. However, the life was not easier there too, and I decided to apply for the Employment Permit System to Korea. In this way, I came to Korea to work (Informant 2).*

Ariño (2008: 6) states about the multiple effects of conflict on the women in Nepal ranging from, the use of gender violence on the huge number of women combatants in PLA<sup>17</sup>- particularly sexual violence, exclusion of women in the peace process-particularly when there was a table talk and resultant signing of the peace agreement between two sides of the Nepal government and Maoist. Like all other conflicts, there was a notable gender dimension in its origin and course.

The impacts the conflicts had on the economy of the country worsened the economic condition more for about a decade-long political turmoil (mainly from 1996 to 2006 as Civil War was there) as Giri (2014) puts forward in his study. This originated the economic slowdown and the unfavorable time for the business and industry in the country. This regression was a push factor as the condition post-conflict also was not very good. The transition was long and all the things were very slow. An informant recounts:

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<sup>17</sup> PLA means People's Liberation Army, organised under the CPN Maoists as their army force. The combatants were women, children and men in the time of their ten-year long war (from 1996-2006) against the Government of Nepal.

*I came to Korea for earning money, as the condition in Nepal still is not good with some conflicts and political problems going on every day. There are no industry and business even after the resolution of the major conflict and no industry and business survived the Maoist attack during the period of war. There is economic crisis as the price in market has no bounds and everywhere there are poor people. The price of coming to Korea was cheaper as I had to invest in language practice and test and flight ticket. We have heard and read that the situation of women laborers is better in Korea and there is more safety than the women in the gulfs, so too, it was easy to decide to come to here. (Informant 5).*

Likewise, pull factors for migration of Nepalese are those factors that attract the individual or group to leave Nepal for the destination countries to work. Those factors are like place utility, which is the desirability of a place that attracts people; better economic opportunities; more jobs, and the promise of a better life etc. Another informant buttressed the self-reliance and economic independence that they achieved through their foreign employment in spite of the patriarchal discrimination at home. According to her:

*My husband and all the family members were against my decision to go to Korea. I wanted to come here as I had heard that the earning was good and many people had solved the problems and had changed their lifestyles too. On the top of that, I found that it was relatively safe for the women and the government itself had formalized it. So, I was attracted by the earning in South Korea and went there for the prosperous lives of the children at home (informant 4).*

### **4.3. Migration to South Korea**

#### **4.3.1. South Korea:**

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) is in the southern half of the Korean peninsula and has a Demilitarized Zone separating herself from North Korea. The Population of 49,044,800 the country is and the Capital is Seoul. The literacy rate is almost 98 percent, as mentioned by this handbook. The per capita income here also is very high.<sup>18</sup> Because of its strong economy, the workers from many countries go there to earn. Nepalese women also have gone there for earning their living.

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<sup>18</sup> South Korea country handbook <https://info.publicintelligence.net/MCIA-SouthKoreaHandbook.pdf>

The Employment Permit System (EPS) for bringing the foreign workers in South Korea came to force in August 2004 (Amnesty International, 2006). In Nepalese workers' case, Nepal government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2007 jointly with the South Korean government for sending Nepalese workers to work in South Korean Companies from 2008 under Employment Permit System (EPS). From this time, men and women both began to formally step in to South Korea for working and eking out their four-square meals and even bettering their economic condition. Now, Nepal has been sending the workers in various fields like agriculture, fishery, construction, manufacturing and services till date (Study Report, Nepal Embassy south Korea, 2013)

Conflict had an equal impact on both the males and females in Nepal. Like the males, females also began to fly to various countries for better opportunities. This trend is still in practice and even multiplying by more in the post conflict transitional state of Nepal where the government is unable to integrate, reconcile and rehabilitate the conflict-ridden people of Nepal to the deemed degree. It is also due to the economic problem and the desire to learn from development the world has achieved. South Korea too has been such place for these Nepalese women who have come here for earning and making their future better (WOREC, et.al.2011).

Figure 1: map of South Korea



Source: Google map<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.google.no/search?q=Map+of+South+korea>, <https://nl.dreamstime.com/stock-illustratie-de-politieke-kaart-van-noord-korea-en-van-zuid-korea-image64023176>

Map 2: Map of Dongdaemun-gu (among the twenty-five districts of Seoul) South Korea where I selected my informants from.



Source: Google map<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.3.2. Nepalese Migrants

After the Seoul, Olympic in 1988, the influx of the foreign workers in South Korea initiated. It became intense with the consequent shortage of the labour in manufacturing and construction especially with the gradual avoidance of dirty, dangerous and difficult work by South Koreans (Chung, 2014). Moreover, Korean Dream has been a strong motivation for the foreign workers who take South Korea as a land of great promise helpful for realizing their dreams and hopes. Another reason for the sudden increase of the foreign workers there is due to the fact that there is a rapid increase in the average wage and the per capita among the Korean work force and, also due to the huge wage disparities between South Korea and labourers-sending countries. These facts work as economic “pull” in drawing the foreign workers here no matter how risky the jobs

<sup>20</sup><https://www.google.no/search?q=map+of+South+Seoul+showing+all+the+25+district>

(accessed on 14.10.2016)

are (ibid). Still another reason behind the flow of foreign workers in South Korea is that it has emerged as a new place of gainful employment as the oil-extracting Middle Eastern countries were during the 60s and 70s (Nepal Embassy, South Korea, 2013).

With the first wave of migration in 1980s, Nepalese People began to go to various countries in search of better employment. As Nepalese democratic movement failed to bring consolidation and the Civil war started from 1996 to 2006 Nepalese abroad were reluctant to return their homeland and the migration multiplied more (Nepal Embassy, South Korea, 2013). Gautam Bhattarai (2005) quotes His Majesty of Government (Now Government of Nepal after the abolishment of Monarchy) the 2003 report of the Department of Labour<sup>21</sup>, that the total numbers of the Nepalese migrant workers to have been around three hundred thousand. This number may be far higher today.

Among the various countries, South Korea is an attractive destination for the Nepalese youths. Nepalese people in large number have gone there for working by using various means and it is said that they have been coming here in significant numbers and are involved in "3D"-dirty, dangerous and difficult works which the south Koreans normally shun (Bhatta, 2013). The Nepalese Diaspora has been increasing day by day with the involvement of Nepalese workers in the field like farming, industries, nursing, academia etc. Though they are in less numbers as compared to the other communities like Filipino, Bangladeshi and Vietnamese, they have a dominant role due to their diverse culture and traits. (ibid).

As South Korea didn't have the official system of hiring the workers until 1994, they first entered here as tourists and the artists. After Nepal restored the democracy in 1990s and changed its labour law, it allowed hundreds of the Nepalese youths to go abroad in search of work (Study report Nepal embassy, South Korea, 2013). The first foreign trainees entered in South Korea during the last half of 1993 when Korea highly needed them for working in the small establishments for the sustained economic development (APMRN, 2014). After South Korean, Industrial Trainee System was introduced, for fulfilling the labour shortages in the blue-collar industries, Nepalese too began to come here through official channel (ibid).

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<sup>21</sup> His majesty the Government of Nepal has changed to Government of Nepal after the overthrow of monarchy in 2006. The Department of Labour works under the Ministry of Labour. It helps the ministry by undertaking the issues related to the foreign employment. It is also responsible for publishing the information regarding the foreign employment.



Only after the MOU on EPS between Nepal and South Korea was signed, Nepalese workers (both men and women) formally began to go there for the foreign employment. In 2007, it was signed between Nepal and South Korea<sup>22</sup>. Through this system, thousands of unskilled Nepalese people (male and female) go to South Korean companies either in the production or the agriculture sector<sup>23</sup>. After it was signed, the old system of hiring Nepalese workers through Informal Industrial Trainee System was abolished. In the new system, the jobseekers from Nepal who pass the certain criterion of South Korean language test sign a contract with the South Korean companies through the government there and work in South Korean industries and agricultural sectors. They have their salaries and working hour as designed by the government there<sup>24</sup>.

After this came into force, Nepalese migrant people formally began to go to South Korea and earn better sum of money as compared to the other destinations (National Human Right Commission, 2013:10). It was pointed out that Nepalese Immigrant workers in South Korea have a very good earning and has an opportunity of the skill development as compared to other gulf countries. South Korean government has been increasing the quota to the Nepali workers too (Gurung, 2004).

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<sup>22</sup>Nepal-Republic of Korea Relations - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nepal ...

<http://mofa.gov.np/nepal-republic-korea-relations/>

<sup>23</sup> Nepal Korea Friendship: Comprehensive Partnership on Development..

[http://www.nepembseoul.gov.np/uploads/files/document/Nepal\\_Korea\\_Friendship:Comprehensive Partnership on Development 22.pdf](http://www.nepembseoul.gov.np/uploads/files/document/Nepal_Korea_Friendship:Comprehensive_Partnership_on_Development_22.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> MOU with SouthKorea.pdf

<https://ceslam.org/files/MOU%20with%20SouthKorea.pdf>

Recently, the MOU was renewed in 2015 and the Nepalese side lobbied for the increment of the quota for Nepalese labourers as well as for their free arrival there. According to the then government statistics 28,453 individuals consisting of about 1,723 women had been working there in the sectors like agriculture, livestock, manufacturing and service. The number of the youths aspiring for the jobs is increasing as they can earn a handsome salary as compared to other traditional destinations. There is also more legal protection and rules as compared to the other places. So, the men and women in a large number try for the job (The Himalayan Times, 2015).

#### **4.4. Nepalese Women Migrants to South Korea**

Because of the internal conflicts, long transition after conflict and economic slowdown, both men and women have equally flown to various countries for better opportunities. The women too have come to South Korea through various formal and informal means as workers, students, tourists, researchers, permanent immigrants, religious pilgrims, business-person, and through marriage etc. (Nepal Embassy South, Korea, 2013). The number of women workers is 8.2 percent among all the foreign workers from 15 countries, according to HRD, Korea. The Nepalese women are only the six-percent of the total Nepalese workers who are supposed to be over 26 thousand. These Nepalese women work in mainly agricultural and production sectors. Within Agriculture, they work in fisheries, gardening, vegetable production, hatchery, mushroom production and bee keeping. Similarly, plastic, electronics and electrical and garment are the main areas under industrial production where they are working (Kathmandu Post, 2012).

We knew that migration in Nepal flourished due to various reasons ranging from natural calamities, poverty, unemployment, low economic growth and conflicts. We also got to know that it first started with the nearest places like India and then gulf countries. Now a question naturally arises in our mind on how and when the migration to South Korea began and how it paved a way for the Nepalese women.

Up to this time, a large number of Nepalese workers – more than 26 thousand- have come to South Korea (The Himalayan Times, 2015). A study shows that Among a third of all migrant workers are women. and the number of Nepalese migrant woman is about 1500 out of the Nepalese workers there (Amnesty International, 2006).

Various formal and informal groups and organizations have assisted the Nepalese immigrant workers in South Korea various times. There are over sixty informal organizations of Nepalese migrant workers based on ethnicity, geography, politics, gender and religion, which are working for the interest of Nepalese workers (Republica, Kathmandu, 2010). These organizations try to cooperate the Nepalese workers in the time of difficulties and also gather for sharing and celebrating in the feast and festivals (Republica, Kathmandu, 2010). One of the informants also mentioned how these organisations are helping these workers especially women and how they are working as a meeting point where they can share their experiences and hours of happiness and sadness. These programmes are working as a healing point besides being a hub for their unity.

The migrant Nepalese workers get help from the various organisations in South Korea. Particularly, women who have problems with their company and do not have other provision get a place in *Women for Women*. Similarly, they also get help for their legal treatment (going to the lawyer) and physical treatment with the doctors.

*Our organisation is for women workers here from Nepal who face problems in the companies and factories here. If they need place to stay and eat when they have problems we welcome them. We also help them fight against the injustice giving them legal access. We take care of them and counsel them ourselves if they are in stress or take to the doctors in the extreme case. We also take them for regular medical treatment and for other medical problems they underwent while working. Here, we also have some other migrant women who do not have proper documents and Nepali women married to the Korean men who have undergone problems and need our help here in a foreign land (Informant III- the then president of Women for women, Korea).*

Non-Resident Nepalese organization Association (NRNA, South Korea)<sup>25</sup> is among such organizations, which have been assisting these Nepalese workers facing various problems. It has constructed Nepal House, in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea for providing the shelter and other assistance to the Nepalese who do not find jobs and are stranded due to various problems.

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<sup>25</sup> Non-Resident Nepalese Association (NRNA, Korea), is an organization form by the Nepalese living in Korea (Non-resident). This is a branch of an umbrella NRNA that has its branches in various countries of the world and it works for the betterment of the migrant Nepalese.

In this way, these kinds of organizations share the pain and happiness and create a sense of oneness among the Nepalese workers and as a whole all Nepalese over there (Republica, 2010).

*The organisations like NRNA, Korea are helping the migrant workers much. For example, various Nepalese migrant workers, businessmen and entrepreneurs helped NRNA, Korea to establish Nepal house where the Nepalese migrants-male and females both –can have place to stay when they have problems in their workplace and are ousted from there. NRNA, Korea is an organisation for the good of all the Nepalese staying here in Korea. Likewise, the organisation even can take the issue to the Nepal Embassy and play a very important role in solving the problems of the all Nepalese migrant workers either male or females. (Informant 15- a Nepalese journalist working in South Korea).*

These Nepalese women also share common experience of all migrants as well as women workers there, where on the one hand, they have got employment opportunities and contributing to their families and have improved their economic status along with learning various new things. On the other, this empowerment is not free of problems as they are also undergoing tough time in their adjustment due to exploitation as well as unhealthy physical and mental state in a foreign land. Behind their migration, unfavourable post conflict scenario and transition has a dominant role, which has been the one of the dominant causes of Nepalese going to foreign countries to work (Nepal Embassy South Korea, 2013).

The women in the foreign country have been receiving both the experiences –bad as well as good. Regarding the problems, the migrant workers had faced linguistic, cultural emotional problems (missed the children and spouse too) and felt anxious about the use of the money they sent home. They also faced the problems of lack of knowledge to use modern appliances, physical and mental problem at work place overtime work without pay and sexual exploitation by the host family (NIDS, 2012). On the other, the social and cultural empowerment of the women, reception of the good status by women in the society; reduction of the discrimination and violence to them; their increased knowledge and consciousness, reparation of the troubled family relations; improvement in the quality of life due to the remittance and exposure ; increment in the decision making process at all levels-familial and social and achievement of the leadership role are some of the positive changes brought about their migration for work ( ibid).

#### **4.5. Chapter Summary**

First of all, I have given the introduction of Nepal, its recent Civil war and Nepalese traditional society. I have also presented the gender roles and problems faced by women in Nepal. After that, I have talked about the history of Nepalese migration in brief. Here I have given the causes of migration and its overall impact. As a concrete example, I have presented the migration in the Gulf region. I have talked about the causes and factors behind the labour migration of men and women and have also shed light on the impacts as well as problems there. Furthermore, after introducing South Korea and my research area Dongdaemun briefly, I have shed light on the recent women labour migration to South Korea as a newer job destination. In this way, I have ended my current chapter.



## Chapter 5: Analysis

In this chapter, there is a focus on data presentation and analysis. Firstly, there is a presentation of the informants' background regarding their age, marital status, level of education, kinds of work they are involved in and duration of their stay in South Korea. Likewise, showing the positive impact of the economic reliance on the gender roles at home, this chapter mainly focuses on the how the foreign employment has given them socio-economic independence and has contributed in their empowerment. The primary and secondary data here show how despite the hurdles and various problems in the foreign employment, these women have achieved the way to empowerment.

### 5.1. Background of the informants

My study underscores the experiences of Nepalese immigrant women in South Korea with a particular focus on their empowerment endeavors. I had taken sixteen interviews. Among them, seven were taken through the skype with the workingwomen there. One interview was with a women worker who had been in Nepal for a short time to meet her families and friends and yet another with a family member (a husband of such working women). One more interview was with the president of only organization for women from Nepal-*Women for Women, Korea*; another with an entrepreneur- turned migrant women; two interviews with the personnel from Nepal Embassy; one with a journalist and the last one with a female student leader and a social worker helping these women from a long time. These were semi-structured interviews that were planned.

Table .1: Demographic information of the informants

Infor mant no.	Age	Sex	Educatio n	Sector of work	Marital Status	No. of Childre n	Period of foreign employ ment in year	Home districts in Nepal
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1	30	F <sup>26</sup>	Intermediate	Agriculture	Married	2	3	Nawalparasi
2	35	F	Intermediate	Agriculture	Married	3	4	Chitwan
3	36	F	S.L.C.	Manufacture	Married	3	3.8	Solukhumbu
4	34	F	Intermediate	Agriculture	Married	3	4	Sunsari
5	25	F	Bachelors'	Manufacture	Unmarried	-	2	Ramechhap
6	36	F	Intermediate	Agriculture	Married	2	3.5	Udayapur
7	33	F	S.L.C.	Agriculture	Married	2	3	Saptari
8	38	F	S.L.C.	Agriculture	Married	3	3.7	Siraha
9	36	F	Twelve/Intermediate	Agriculture	Married	2	4	Chitwan
10	40	M	Bachelors'	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Kathmandu
11	40	F	N/A	The then president of Women for women <sup>27</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

<sup>26</sup> Female.

<sup>27</sup> The purpose of the organisation Women for Women- a social organization helping Nepali women in need, has been mentioned in the earlier discussion too.



12	39	F	Intermediate	Entrepreneur turned woman worker who worked in the manufacturing sector in the past.	married	2	19	Vojpur
13	45	M <sup>28</sup>	N/A	Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Nepal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	44	M	N/A	Labor Attaché, Embassy of Nepal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15	43	M	N/A	Journalist	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
16	37	F	N/A	Student leader, entrepreneur and social worker	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

### 5.1.1. Age, Sex and Marital status of the Informants

The seven Nepalese women immigrant workers in South Korea and one interviewed in Nepal who was in a short leave from South Korea and still another fresh returnee women were between the ages of 25-38. Among these nine female workers, eight were married and had two or more

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<sup>28</sup> Male.

children and one was still unmarried. These women hail from eastern to western parts of Nepal. One family member, a husband of a woman worker who was interviewed was 40 years old and hailed from the capital city-Kathmandu. Most of these women were married and had children.

It is found that especially in the rural area in Nepal, the people take age as the base for an individual's household, roles and responsibilities and status as a whole. Here also we can see that around 90 percent of the women workers are over 25 years and married too. I also did not find any women newly married and not having any children. In Nepal gender role works much and the patriarchy does not easily allow the unmarried women for the foreign employment. Even if they are married, they have an easy way if they have children, otherwise it's difficult for them to go out of their homes to a foreign land as the people suspect her character (can leave her husband forever when she finds another man there) and consider them immature as well as unserious if they don't have anyone—especially children—for whom they work hard. Also because of the added responsibility of the new home and children, the Nepalese women chose the foreign employment as a possibility of their economic wellbeing.

A woman social worker (the then president of *Women for Women*) actively working for these women, was 40 years old and had been living there in a business visa that is different from that of these working women. So, the children, duration and the place in Nepal were not asked for in the interview. Another entrepreneur-turned immigrant woman had come to South Korea (about 19 years ago in 2014 at the time of interview) long before the formal labour agreement (Employment Permit System) between the two governments in 2007. She hailed from the eastern part of Nepal and had two children.

Moreover, the two personnel in the Embassy (males) were not asked about their marital status, and the place where they come from, as these facts had no relevance to my current project. Another informant (I15) was a male journalist writing for the beat for several years. I did not ask him other details than related to the topic, as they were not relevant to my thesis. Likewise, the last informant was a woman student leader (ex-president of *Society of Nepalese Students in Korea (SONSIK)*). As she is a social worker and has been relentlessly working for the welfare of these women and knows many things about them as well as has a political background too, I chose her as one of my informants who as a woman migrant from Nepal has a shared domain with these workingwomen. For me, as other details of her seemed irrelevant to my thesis, I asked her only the questions related to my topic.

### 5.1.2. Informants' Education

Among the sixteen interviews conducted, the nine of them were with the women workers and one was with a social worker and still another was with entrepreneur –turned migrant woman worker. From the Nine working women, five were intermediate level passed and three were just School Leaving Certificate/secondary level passed and one was Bachelor's level passed. The entrepreneur –turned immigrant woman worker also had an education up to the intermediate level. From above information, we can infer that only educated women can go for foreign employment in South Korea as they now days need to pass language examinations designed for the Employment Permit System (EPS). Even though they are educated, most of them had to compromise their education despite their good studies, as they were married and had to handle their new home and children. Here, we can see the patriarchy playing a very important role to control their career and education.

Similarly, thinking it as irrelevant, I did not ask the level of education with the social worker. Likewise, I also did not ask, the male personals in the Embassy, the journalist and the woman student leader about their academic level, as it was not relevant to my thesis.

We see that it is important to know the Nepalese distinction of the education levels for understanding the table 1, where there is the educational information of the informants.

Table 2: Nepali distinction of educational levels:

Level of Education	Class
Foundation level	1-8
Secondary level /School Leaving Certificate	9-10
Higher Secondary level /Intermediate	11-12
Bachelor's Level	13-15
Master's Level	16-17

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

### 5.1.3. Types and duration of the Informants' foreign employment:

Here, I have categorised the kind of jobs these women do in South Korea and the period of their work in South Korea. As the table 1 shows, out of the nine women workers seven were involved

in the agriculture sector and two out of them were in the manufacture sector. Moreover, the woman entrepreneur who had entered Korea as a labourer had first come here as an industrial worker in the manufacturing sector and later on she changed her status to business. This also shows the economic independence and empowerment of the women who come for the foreign employment and earn their reliance so as to even establish their own business.

Regarding the duration of their employment, five of the women have 3 or more years of foreign employment, one has two and other three have 4 years of working experience in South Korea. Likewise, the woman entrepreneur has been living there for nineteen years as she has her own business now.

The table shows that women workers mainly come in the agriculture sector from Nepal. The works in the agriculture ranges from the mushroom to tomatoes fields and animal husbandry. May be because of the heavy works in the factories and industries, they are put in under this category by Labour Ministry in Nepal.

In this way, this study reveals that the period of foreign employment has been longer and the more years these women workers work here, the more earning they have been making and paving the way for their empowerment. In the proceeding topics, I will show the causes for their involvement, the impacts of it in the positive light as well as the problems and challenges they have been facing, in detail. I will conclude my study with their endeavours for the empowerment despite the various hurdles on their way. Here, while presenting these facts, I will put my findings on their experiences that I gathered from the interviews.

## **5.2. Causes behind the foreign employment**

As discussed above, because of the various reasons, the foreign employment began in Nepal. Along with the male members, the women also began to go to different foreign countries as they were equally marred by the problems at home. The armed conflict, post conflict violence, transition natural disasters, political instability at home, poverty or the economic crisis, discrimination and social stigmatisation resulted in the high mobility of the people looking for the better opportunities at the foreign destinations. Along with the males, now women – adolescent girls and adult ones have been migrating in a high rate with the government backing

it (WOREC, 2009). Some of these reasons forcing the Nepali women to the foreign employment destinations will be discussed under the separate headings below.

### **5.2.1. Conflict and Poverty**

It is a well-known fact that people are displaced by the conflicts internally and externally. In this category, women and children suffer more. Though it is said that women should be given a chance of full participation in the peace process, there is still persistence of exclusion of these women as active players in the prevention of conflict and peace-keeping. This has happened all around the world. However, this has been well-accepted fact that women can play key role in development and poverty alleviation in the post conflict environment. Various organizations including the UN have accepted this fact.

Because of the ten -year long conflict and its consequences, Nepalese people were forced to migrate and earn their living. This has been discussed in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter discussing the Nepalese society at the backdrop of war. Informant 1 narrates her story behind coming to South Korea.

*I had to come to south Korea as there was no any job due to the decade long Maoist war. There was no any business and industry, and whatever were there, they suffered the destruction caused by the war. People died for the betterment of their children. But even after the war stopped, the scene was no better. Other regional and caste-based conflicts marred the politics and the leaders again were attracted by the “chair” which had made them dishonest and corrupt in the past and the same was going to happen afterwards that time too. Even after the election to the people’s constituent Assembly, it failed to come out with the constitution multiple times.*

*All of these made us suffer a lot. We did not have enough money for our living however, there is a constant price hike and everything has become costlier. We should send our children schools and pave a way for their careers. If I had stayed in Nepal, I would not have earned anything and our lives would have been difficult. I was not involved in the job that gave me money. Even after passing intermediate level (very first step of higher education), I was only involved in the*

*household work that gave me no money back. Seeing all this, I realized that I can come to South Korea as a lot of women are coming here formally through Employment Permit System of Nepal Government.*

*This way, the risks of going to other countries (gulf ones) were minimized, and I had a confidence. I had a discussion with my husband that night. At first, he was hesitant to send me for foreign employment and he himself was ready for it giving the responsibility of children to me. But later, I persuaded him to take care of our children and do small business in Nepal while I would be in South Korea. Then, after some formal procedures (like language test and others) I passed for the entry in South Korea to work in the agricultural sector. Now, I work in South Korean farm that produces mushrooms. Working here, I save at least One hundred thousand NRS.<sup>29</sup> With this money; I have been able to send my children to good private schools and establish a business for my husband.*

### **5.2.2. Gender inequality and dependence**

There is a huge gender gap in the Nepalese societies and we have discussed it in the background to the Nepalese society, beforehand in the chapter four. One of the informant`s states that the gender inequality and discrimination was a harassing aspect back home which impeded the development and encouraged the women to leave homes. She states:

*While in Nepal, the gender discrimination was a discouraging aspect which also hindered my development. Even though the men did nothing extra, they were superior and ordered us. We had nothing in our control, so to earn something and to gain economic independence I came to Korea (Informant 7).*

It is difficult for the women in Nepal to challenge the normative system in the society from which one comes. These migrant women, who are our focus in the current project-suffered a lot at the hand of patriarchy, underwent all kinds of discriminations and had subjugated lives when they were in Nepal. Because of this also, leaving their home country and people was easy for them as

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<sup>29</sup> NRS is Nepali currency and one NRS equals almost 13 Kroner, though the price rate fluctuates time and again.

they stepped in a new domain of working for their independence. Beforehand, the gender norm did not allow them to go out and earn and they were compelled to depend on the males-father, brothers and husbands. Informant 2 shares that:

*I underwent the gender discrimination, almost on a daily basis. Neither I could avoid that nor challenge. So, I always wanted to leave home and earn my independence. This has been materialized as I am working and earning here in South Korea.*

### **5.2.3. Globalization and its Impacts**

The growth of media and network are exposing the sophisticated and glamorous lives and good earning of the developed countries like south Korea and these factors act as pull factor for the youths including the women of Nepal. In Mufwene's (2004:218) words globalisation connects the people of various parts of the world through the cultural aspects like economy, politics, and language omitting the existing barriers and making them interdependent.

Nepalese migrant women's journey to South Korea also could not be untouched of these above-mentioned factors in this age of globalisation. As the economic side also connects the people of different countries, they migrated there to earn and strengthen their socio-economic aspect. Moreover, South Korea came as the major employment destination among others as there was the need of cheap labour in the industry and companies there on the one hand, and south Korea was/has been as comparatively better foreign employment destination regarding earning and human right conditions of the labourers –including women, on the other. So, it is highly desired by Nepalese women. A woman migrant worker opines that:

*Korea has been a choice of many because of good earning, human right mechanism and others. For me too, these aspects were better than that of the gulf countries. So, Korea was my choice (Informant 5).*

These women have got to know various new things about the lifestyles and culture of South Korea and are experience the joy and despair in Korean society (Bhatta, 2013). The impact of Korean culture and “Hallyu” (the Korean wave) can be seen in Nepalese society in the form of the dramas, and hairstyle and other products. This is the cultural impact from South Korea in Nepali societies in recent times (Bhatta, 2013). This is also working as a pull factor for many

Nepali girls. The informant I5 revealed that she was at her University level and got to read about Korean life styles along with watching some Korean Movies. This gave a glamorous impression in her mind about South Korea and it was easy for her to choose Korea as her employment destination later.

Along with working skills and cultural impacts, the Nepalese women in Korean societies have learnt various lessons for life like respect to the time; perseverance and relentless effort as the secrecy of development; politeness, simple life and high thinking; cleanliness and careful use of foods etc. Almost all the informants revealed this fact to me during the interviews.

### **5.3. Impacts of the foreign employment**

Despite the various hurdles on the way, that we also will discuss under a separate heading below, the Nepalese migrant women in South Korea have been successful in achieving socio-economic empowerment. In the beginning, they were fed up of the economic problems at home, and they took themselves as less significant, and some even took themselves as the burden of the family. But after deciding to come to South Korea, they felt happy. Here, they have seen the development in its prime and their employment is also giving them handsome of money. With this money, they are able to send their children to good school; to help in household necessities; to help their husband start their own business; to save some amount for their own future business or income generating activities. They are helping in the poverty reduction and development endeavour of the nation as a whole. Here, I am going to discuss the benefits of foreign employment of Nepalese women in South Korea in separate headings.

#### **5.3.1. Women's access to decision making**

In most of the cases (may be not always), the foreign employment of the women and their earnings can help to redefine the gender inequalities. For example, traditional female roles had to be assumed by the males back home, helping the change in division of labor between both the men and women (Curran et al, 2003).

Bhatta (2013) opines that this mass has a potential to contribute to the labour market along with sending remittance and helping the nation through social activities and networking. The Nepalese immigrant women have been earning and sending the remittance to their country. This way, they are helping their families economically for making their lives better and uplifting the ailing



economy of the country as a whole. They have learnt the skills in a foreign land and have achieved their independence and self-reliance working in the foreign labour destinations like South Korea.

### **5.3.2. Contribution in education**

The migrant women are also motivated to do difficult jobs thinking that with their income their children can make their career through the private education, which is normally English-based. This is the reality of majority of the informants who are doing every possible job for sending their children to good schools so as to make them sellable in the job market later. One of the women workers there tells her story:

*The English –based education is a precondition in the modern job market. The private schools, though have high charges, focus on all the aspects of the children. The children’s English becomes better and can easily find the jobs later. The private schools are regular, have less holidays and have competitiveness that is beneficial to our children. The teachers also focus on the studies, discipline and extra-curricular activities that make them forward. Before sending to the private school, I used to send the children to the government schools.*

*As our economic condition was not better and our earning was very low, we could not send them to private schools. Our well-off neighbors used to send their children to the private schools, then. Their children had a good English and they were relatively forward. In my children’s school, the teacher did not use to give assignment regularly and we were not called to know their progress, either. But when I came to South Korea and began to earn, the first thing was we changed their school. As we worried about their future, we transferred them to the private school.*

*Now, they began to get their assignments and my husband was also called for the regular meeting in the school. Now, they have improved their studies and are more focused in learning. The work here is not easy and you have to undergo several problems. It is especially more difficult when you are in a foreign land leaving your family back. I am doing all this as I want to give them a good future and I am satisfied about it (Informant 4).*

By sending the Children to the better schools, these women have also achieved a good reputation in the society and there is value of their self-worth now. For Pandey (2014:19), the realization of self-worth is also empowerment. During the interviews, the women said that, they realized the sense of self-worth, when their opinions were valued and they had a good influence over the decision making at household and community level. All of these changes occurred after their foreign employment and consequent earning and better schooling of their children. Now, they have achieved a better status in the whole community and have better reputation too. An informant shares her own story related to these kind of experiences as:

*We have two children. Both of us wanted to give them a good future although we had difficult lives ourselves After I transferred children from government to private school and took the whole responsibility of their expenditure myself, my husband began to give my opinion and decision a free space. Now, he seeks for my opinion in every big or small issue that concerns our family and household. Even in the public, our reputation has changed and people have begun to value and respect us. Now, we have a good influence over the community issue.*

*Before, we used to have a small business and earn a meager amount. We had a very difficult life and we used to send our children to the government schools. That time we did not have a good influence over the community matters. But it, all changed with my decision to go to Korea and earn. After I earned and had a better economic status and sent the children to the high-charging private schools, the perception of the people towards me and my family changed a lot, giving us a social dignity and worth (Informant 6).*

### **5.3.3. Contribution in sustainable development and poverty reduction**

Many women migrants buy the land or the real estate with their earnings from the foreign land. In this regard, women send much more from their earning and also want to exercise control on the family expenditure and want to make sure that the money is spent on food and clothes of the family back home. This is a common pattern elsewhere despite the low earning and labour opportunity than men. One of the women recounts her past in the following lines:

*In Nepal, we had a very difficult life. We did not have good jobs and neither land for tilling. Our economic status was very low. It was difficult to send our children even to the government schools let alone the private school, as the school has some charges regarding their exams and others though it is free education up to the secondary level.*

*It all changed with my foreign employment. In the beginning, we had decided that my husband would leave for a foreign job, but later, I found the lives of Nepali youths hellish in the gulf region. We noticed that here is women migration for the work in Korea. It even attracted us because it was a government sending the women and their lives there is not as bad as the women in the gulf region face. After I began to earn, I bought two lands in Nepal, changed the school of the children and help to establish my husband's own business. Before, we had loans from different parties that I paid later. Now, we are saving some of it for our daughter's further studies, who wants to go abroad. I have learnt many things coming here and my secondary level education helped me a lot. So, I think, my daughter can have a better life with her studies (Informant 8).*

Khanal et. al. (2010:39-40) further talks about the role of remittance in the households and country as a whole. The report underscores the role of the remittance in minimizing the poverty; providing the youth with the employment opportunity when there are unemployment, low economic growth and internal conflict. The inflows of the remittances are maintaining the ailing economy due to the lack of investment friendly environment and helping the sustainability in reducing the poverty and creating the welfare of the people, external as well as internal stability, and the growth of foreign reserve. One of the informants who lived and earned for about four years and have just returned her homeland says that:

*The money I sent from there did a lot of help in my family. The family could open up its own business and did well even in the time of conflict and turbulences and they could invest some of it on the education of my kids. Likewise, it also added in the remittance of the country (Informant 9).*

#### **5.3.4. The Support in the household necessities**

During interview, the respondents said that their men's earning was not enough as there was a regular price hike in Nepal. As they had no good education and experience, it was not possible

to find a good job in Nepal. So, they needed to go to earn money outside but they had heard very painful stories about the women in gulf. So, it was very difficult to choose a better and safer destination. One of the informants puts:

*My husband's earning was not sufficient to handle the household, as we had to spend on everything like food, clothes, rent medication, and others. After I came here and began to earn, our problems solved as we could pay for all of those expenses. Vary many time we underwent financial problems and it was difficult to find good jobs with my education so that I could contribute some. In the beginning, it was very difficult for us for choosing most safe and good destination, as everyone heard some painful stories about some Nepali Women in gulf. So, we had to convince all he members (Informant 2).*

Some of the women informants also share that they earn money with much difficulty but they have no control over the money sent by them. With the money, they sent to their homes, the males and other family members use the money in buying land or building the homes in the ownership of those members. Though there is a provision of equal right to the property in Nepalese law, they are deprived of that in practical terms (CEDAW, 2009).

### **5.3.5. Self –reliance and establishment of their own businesses**

It was revealed during the interviews that Nepalese women have migrated for the foreign employment there also to establish their own business or to expand the old ones if they had some in advance, through their earnings. Traditionally, women are not supposed to earn for their families by working in the public spheres. The patriarchy restricts them within the household chores like the production of food, cooking, taking care of the children and other members while it frees men for income generation<sup>30</sup>. However, most of the informants expressed that it is a symbol of backwardness to limit them only to the household chores. For them, they need to go out of the boundary and earn as the things are expensive and difficult to attain. Now, with the outer changed perception, the Nepalese society has also changed its ways of dealing and women are equally in the forefront. Even the issue of independence comes first while marrying-the couple prefer each other if both are independent. According to one of the informants:

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<sup>30</sup> Across the Lines: The Impact of Nepal's conflict on Women. Advocacy Forum and International Centre for Transitional Justice, Kathmandu Nepal, December,2010. P.19 (Accesed on 10.03.2017)

*The women migration in Nepal is increasing day by day as there is modern viewpoint that equally empowers both men and women. Previously the patriarchal values put restriction on the mobility of the women, now it underscores equity and equality. It is very expensive out there and the life has been complex, too. Women must be educated and earn themselves. The society has acknowledged this fact and stresses the independence of women. (Informant 7).*

During the interview of the women and other concerned persons in South Korea, it was very clear that the Nepalese migrant women are working there in the Korean companies and farms and earning the money and sending it back home so that they can use that amount to open up their business after returning there. As the stay is meant to be for the limited period, they have been doing their best while earning there.

#### **5.3.6. Change in perception of the Gender roles**

In Nepal, there has been a great change regarding the gender roles. As Nepalese society is patriarchal one, the women were assigned certain soft roles. It was not allowed for women to go for the foreign employment some years ago. And it was even very much difficult for the unmarried one. But this is not a case now as many women are going for foreign employment and are supporting their families back home. One of the informant shares her experiences and says that:

*I am not married and I was studying my Master's level when I came here. In past, it was not possible for an unmarried girl to go for foreign employment. Later on, the society would look down upon us saying that we have stayed out of the country even when unmarried. But this is not the case now, there is a general belief that even unmarried women equally can support their families when they have a good education (Informant 5).*

The foreign employment and subsequent income generation by the women has now helped to change the established patriarchal notion of discriminatory gender roles. Previously, women were not that much encouraged to go out and earn for the family. It was not manly to depend upon the earnings of a woman for the men in the Nepalese societies. The men thought themselves as the breadwinner for the whole family and women's role was centred on the family care.

However, with this new kind of independence, the women have earned through the foreign employment, now the men take the earning of women as the matter of equality. Everything has been normal and the perception of the society has been positive on these women who are breadwinners now.

The number of the women in the labour market has been gradually increasing since 1990. Due to the effort of government as well as national and international organizations, the women are made aware, organised and skilled. These women are able to earn money and have also established their own business. One woman worker came to South Korea around one and half decade ago. later on, she even established her own business (Nepalese restaurant) and now is also working in the social sector- for instance helping other women. She unfolds that:

*I had come to Korea long before the formal agreement between the two governments of Nepal and South Korea. That time I used to work in the agriculture. I worked about eight years and collected some money so that I could open my own business. Now it has been six years that I have my own business. I am earning money independently and my husband also helps me. He came to South Korea to help me start my own business. Now, my children are going college and are living with my parents in Nepal. I am earning and saving a good sum of money here. I have bought lands in Nepal and helped my relatives a lot. This has been possible only through my foreign employment (Informant 12 an entrepreneur -turned Nepali woman migrant worker in South Korea).*

#### **5.4. The problems and challenges on their way**

These migrant women workers suffer from the gendered cultural practices of the host country as most of them are employed in the informal sectors involving unskilled and menial labour like domestic works, child or elderly care, packaging, carrying things and entertainment sectors. These pose them the danger of sexual abuse and exploitation, which perpetuate gender base violence against of the article 3 and 5 of Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2009). One of the informants working in the South Korean farm shares her experiences and her struggles in the lines below:

*We had a formal contract with the Korean owner and had the insurance too. In this regard, we did not face the problems related to this. However, gender discrimination was*

*there as the owner used to order us and sometimes rebuke us. Even the wife of the owner used to scold us in small things. Furthermore, sometimes the owner used to drink and behave badly because of which we always felt insecure (Informant 4)*

Testimonies gathered from the migrant workers' counselling centres and the experts show that the migrant workers in South Korea have their wages withheld and have to work longer hours for the lower wages as compared to the Korean nationals in the similar jobs (Amnesty International, 2006). These workers also are denied the right to be involved in the trade unions and experience high levels of verbal and physical abuse, suffer serious industrial accidents and receive inadequate treatment and little or no compensation (Amnesty International, 2006). An informant had some bad experiences of her owner forcing her to do extra time. She tells that her owner used to scold her and give mental stress too. She remembers:

*My owner was very adamant and used to force all the labourers for overtime as he had to finish the work in deadline. Saying 'no' used to be very risky. He was aggressive and used to use Korea slang like Sekhya (meaning a puppy) when he was angry at us (Informant 8).*

The workers also face the problems due to the language difficulty as not many Korean speak English even in the government buildings for foreigners (Amnesty International, 2006). Like all migrant workers, these Nepalese workers have also been facing problems like ill-treatment, discrimination, physical exploitation, physical and verbal abuse, violence, sexual exploitation / harassment (especially women) difficult working environment, low payment, homesickness, linguistic and cultural differences, stressful job environment etc among others (ibid). One of the informants shares her experience of these problems in this way:

*Our company owner had a very weak English. As I was very new in South Korea, I was not good in Korean language. So, I used the English in communication. Several times, I did not understand his intentions and there was communication misfire between us. In the early years, my life used to be much difficult because of many other differences, too. Along with language, because of the cultural difference, I had difficult times. For example, the punctuality and promise system is very strict there. Once I was late in my work. He did not enjoy this and was even angry with me. Other time, I was unable to fulfil*

*my promise due to some difficulty. The owner hoped for the fulfilment of the promise and when he found it to be unfulfilled, he was angry again (Informant 6).*

Along with these, the workers there in South Korean companies and farms, face accidents and sometimes death too, in which circumstances the factory owners try to hide the cases and mistreat the workers in return. The medium and small sized industries for doing the dangerous and difficult works had been filled with the low paid migrant workers (Amnesty International, 2006). This has created a sense of pessimism and hopelessness in the workers. (The Himalayan Times, 2015). Moreover, the workers are required to work long hours, night shifts, many without overtime pay, and often have their wages withheld. On average, they are paid less than South Korean workers in similar jobs and are at greater risk of industrial accidents, with inadequate medical treatment or compensation (ibid).

According to most of the informants and the concerned people from Nepal, the migrant workers are given the very dangerous, dirty and difficult works. In short, they are also called 3D work and we have a discussion on the issue earlier too. Here also, one of these women says the same story in her own words:

*The dirty, dangerous and difficult, (3D) work are done by most of the immigrants as the Korean nationals are given the simple works. If they face accidents, they are given small amount and the owners stay in safe side. Most of the times, the employers want us to do overtime. Sometimes, if I did not want to work overtime, the owner used to inquire about it much I felt awkward then. The workers with no papers used to be more victimized. As the Korean spoke the same language and shared the same cultural environment, it was easier for them to work (Informant 3).*

The migrant women, about one third the migrant labourers in south Korea, are facing discrimination as compared to the men regarding the payment and are also at risk of sexual harassments in the work place. These women have suffered many human right violations which reveal the breach of international human right treaties like Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to which South Korea is a party (Amnesty International, 2006).



Although it is difficult to work in a foreign country, however, the women who had been doing nothing in Nepal have earned a lot and have improved their socio-economic status. About the positive changes in the women's life the deputy head of mission (Informant 13) shares that:

*The Nepalese migrant women have undergone some problems. But what they have achieved outweighs how they have done it. Of course, there are some problems while working in a foreign land like the problems of stress and conflict. But whomever when ask about the work in Korea, they have been highly positive about the earning and change it has brought in their lives. The Nepali women are very happy about it as they have achieved their empowerment despite the hurdles on the way. They have learnt new skills and have also learnt a lesson for lives. After they return, as they usually opine, the life in Nepal will become a systematic one where their learning will play a significant role*

Even the labor Attaché (Informant 14) and informant 16-a women student leader cum social worker had similar positive conception about the empowerment of Nepalese women workers. Whatever the difficulties, the impact it has brought in their lives as well as society has been more positive, as they put similar ethos.

## **5.5. Chapter Summary**

There is a presentation and analysis of the data collected from fieldwork in the current chapter. The chapter first ensues with the demographic background of the informants where their age, sex and marital state academic status, the duration of their foreign employment has been given. After that, at first, I have presented many causes for the foreign employment of these women various sub-headings. There is the presentation of the interviews I took for justifying the themes as per the objectives of the study and my research questions. Here, the causes of their involvement, positive and negative sides of their involvement, their reflection of the impacts in relation to their empowerment and their endeavors despite these challenges have been presented. The data used within the different themes mostly come from the interviews with these women and the people concerned. Along with the workingwomen, I have presented the interviews of social workers, journalist, government personnel and leaders working for them.



## **Chapter 6. summary and Conclusion**

The present study has examined the impact of foreign employment on women's socio-economic lives. For this, it has undertaken the issue of Nepalese emigrant women workers to South Korea. It has specifically highlighted how women's involvement in the income generating activities through foreign employment has helped them to improve their status there in South Korea, back home and in the communities. The study has also shed light on the problems and challenges on the way of their empowerment. This study is based on sixteen semi-structured interviews. For projecting the actual condition of the women, as far as possible, the interviews were taken from all the angles possible. The working women, past workers, social workers, representative of the Nepal Government, journalist as well as family members comprised of the group.

In the introductory part, after shedding light on my topic and my problem, I have presented some of the research question on which my entire research revolves. After that, I have presented the previous studies on the matter and my motive, scope and the limitations of the research work. With an outline of the whole research, I have concluded the introduction part. After that, I have presented about the choice of the method and its necessity. I also have talked there about my prime data collection technique of interview and how I conducted it in my field. Moreover, I have mentioned the challenges I faced on the way and have encapsulated the part with the reflexivity and ethical parameters I applied in my research. Furthermore, I have used the lenses of gender and empowerment for sharing the experiences of these women, in the third part here, I have used gender so as to present their gendered status and challenges at home and abroad and empowerment for their ultimate achievement. I have discussed identity, agency and critical consciousness within the lens of empowerment.

I have started the fourth chapter with the general background of Nepalese society, its conflict and the state of gender. So as to provide the contextual framework or the study, the study further talks about how the migration started in Nepali society, what its causes are and how it started with the gulf region and now how Korea has been a promising destination for all. After talking as a whole about the Nepalese migrants in South Korea, I have discussed about the Nepalese women and their journey to South Korea, recently. In this way, the fifth chapter has presented the data and its analysis on the background of chapter one to four.

My research has revolved around the questions of how the foreign employment in South Korea has empowered these women, what are the challenges on their way and how are they coping and moving ahead. The finding of my study has shown that the problems like conflict, poverty, gender inequality have been acting as the push factor whereas the dream of income generation and economic independence have been acting as the pull factor in the foreign employment of the women. My study has been on the women emigrant workers in one of the newest destinations South Korea. Here, I have presented their stories and voices through the Skype interviews taken with them. I have also used some of the reports and newspaper articles on the present issue.

The migrant women and their families in Nepal also had low investment and saving before. But, after they have been to foreign lands, they have been saving and investing their earning. After they are independently earning there, they have earned their self-reliance. After they will return their homes, they will establish some business and income generating work. For this purpose, we discussed above that they didn't like the misuse of their money especially by their husband, and by other family members. So, they have lent it to some friends or saved in their accounts. In a sense, the motivation of improving their condition is very high and plausible.

The values of Nepalese patriarchal society with its socio-cultural and legal framework hindered the development of these women till date. The Women were involved in unpaid domestic work and didn't have their say. But, after they have gone for the foreign employment and have been sending economic support to their families, they have been valued and their voices have begun to be heard. What I have found through the study is that because of the foreign employment in South Korea, they have achieved economic independence and respect, have contributed in the businesses and education of the families, have contributed for the overall national development through their remittances.

For the empowerment of the women, the role of the education is a vital one. If the similar education, which is given to the men, is given to a woman, she educates and empowers the whole nation with her education. There is a saying "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation."<sup>31</sup> .

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<sup>31</sup> Commission on the Status of women, Fifteenth Session, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Meetings. "Absence of Women Leadership Positions Undermines Democracy," Economic and Social Council, WOM/1541, 28702/2006.

Because of the lack of the employment opportunities for both men and women, they migrate to the foreign countries to earn. Nepalese women go there to earn money so that they can afford for the better schooling of their children and support their families back home. Sometimes ago the rate of women going for foreign migration was not high but nowadays they are excelling their males in terms of the earning. There is more gender awareness and men have begun to respect the women and they are also getting equal opportunities.

In the beginning, the perception towards men and women was different as the people In Nepal were used to practicing the patriarchal norms and values. It was more negative when it came to women foreign employment. But later on, as it was better than the male migration affecting their everything at home-children parents and wives and the work at the workplaces, the women began to migrate. Furthermore, the men could open up their own business and handle their families well while the wives could make money utilizing their otherwise wasteful time while in Nepal. After all of this, the perception of the society has greatly changed and the gender roles have been also redefined assigning the role of 'breadwinner' to men and women equally.

Similarly, the study has also surfaced the challenges and problems undergone by them in the foreign country like South Korea. The challenges like forced labor, difficult works and gender discrimination are some while the problems of sexual abuse, mental harassment, human right violation, are others which were abundant there. The story of the respondents to have been rebuked in slang language by the factory owner and to have been misbehaved and exploited show these problems. Moreover, the case of drunk owner and fear of violence from him, the cases of sexual exploitation by all the males (including the co-workers from Nepal) are other proofs of the challenges there.

We can see that the present study has attempted to analyze the relationship of the foreign employment of the women in South Korea and their empowered condition. The study also shows societal gender construct as one of the hindrances on their way. Nepalese emigrant women workers have overcome all the problems and challenges on their way. It argues that despite the various problems like sexual exploitation, harassments, psychological ill treatment, gender biasedness, they have been working and earning in the foreign land (South Korea) till date.

We, cannot oversee the other aspect of the foreign employment that it has not been devoid of the problems of structural violence, exploitation and ill treatment. However, the negative sides are outweighed by the positive results that is empowerment of these women.

In this way, my research questions on how the employment in Korea empowered these women what challenges they are undergoing and how are they dealing with them and moving ahead have been the centre of focus throughout my current thesis. What I had hypothesized in the beginning has been the case too. My hypothesis that these women despite the challenges related to structural violence and their gender have overcome them and achieved empowerment at last.

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