



Educational Migration: Experiences of Female Student Migrants

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Abstract - The paper aims to enlighten and break away from the general notion of migration as an unorganized sector. The Census of India captures the reasons for migration. It defines these reasons for migration as work/employment, business, education, marriage, moving after birth, moving with a household, and any other. The studies that have been done earlier talked about the socio-economic perspective of migrant women, specifically the unorganized sector's migrant women labor. Not many studies have been done to understand the standpoint of migrant female students. Thus, this paper aims to go beyond the undiscovered aspects of migration. It would discover the barriers and hurdles these migrated female students face in the new location. The women of the current generation are more aware of their capabilities and aspirations. They are, therefore, ready to relocate wherever the best opportunities lead. In order to achieve their dreams and follow their passions, women migrate for a variety of reasons. These reasons include educational facilities, job opportunities, and income generation. Women who migrated for work and education between 2001 and 2011 grew at a rate that outpaced men who moved for similar reasons, according to an IndiaSpend analysis of Census data. Despite all the benefits and empowerment that come with women moving away for educational opportunities, they still have to navigate discrimination as they try to redefine their private and public spheres in their quest for fulfillment. Communication is essential to life, but when linguistic barriers appear, it becomes difficult and can lead to feelings of isolation. The sense of isolation is immediate when one migrates from one place to another. Similarly, one's identity is influenced by their region, culture, and religion. Given that India is a country with many different cultures and religions, even moving from one place in a state to another causes one to notice cultural differences. Learners' experiences of education will vary depending on their psychological and physical state, their interactions with others, and broader institutional and environmental constraints. Thus, this paper examines the challenges, experiences, and burdens these female student migrants face. The paper will make use of various sets of interviews conducted with multiple female migrant participants.

Keywords: educational migration, women, gender, female students, lived experiences

I. INTRODUCTION

The women of the current generation are more aware of their capabilities and aspirations. As a result, they are willing to relocate wherever the best opportunities lead them. With globalisation, convenience and favourable circumstances have entered the majority of our lives. They have higher self-esteem and societal respect and are increasingly functioning as more independent, autonomous beings capable of leading more meaningful lives (Madhok & Raj, 2011).

Due to obstacles in achieving their dreams, women migrate for various reasons, including income generation, job opportunities, educational facilities, etc. The theory of intervening options attempts to describe the likelihood of migration. It states that opportunities to settle at the destination influence likelihood more than distance or population pressure at the starting point.

The general notion of migration in India is always linked to the unorganized sector. However, that constitutes only one type of migration. The Census of India captures the migration's reasons. It defines these reasons for migration as work/employment, business, education, marriage, moving after birth, moving with a household, and any other. There are two types of migration in the Census of India: Migration by birthplace and Migration by place of last residence. When a person is listed in the census at a place, i.e., a village or town, distinct from their place of birth, they are considered a migrant by place of birth.

According to the Zelinsky Model of Migration Transition, the kind of migration that takes place within a country is determined by its level of development or type of society. It focuses on the stages of economic and demographic development. It argues that demographic conditions and migratory patterns are related to levels of urbanization, industrialization and modernization. The youth will likely be attracted to cities, states, or places in India with high wages and strong labour markets. Due to this, these places are more likely to have higher educational institutes (Chandrashekar & Sharma, 2014). According to Lee (1975), each location has unique positive and negative characteristics. While positive aspects tend to draw people in or attract individuals from other places, bad factors tend to repel them. According to an IndiaSpend analysis of Census data (Hindustan Times, 2017), women who migrated for work and education grew at a faster rate than men who moved for similar reasons between 2001 and 2011. Education has been identified as a catalyst for social, economic, and cognitive change in sociological research (Williams, 2009).

Despite all of the empowerment and benefits of women migrating for educational opportunities, they continue to face challenges and discrimination as they negotiate traditional norms and expectations in their efforts to redefine their private and public spheres. Women face difficulties because of language, culture, religion, identity, and other factors, whether they are intrastate or interstate migrants or migrants from other countries in India. Mallet et al. (1999) observe that sociocultural qualities and behaviours are more challenging to change and are usually the last to adjust during acculturation.

When one moves from one location to another, the feeling of loneliness is immediate. Communication is essential to life, but it becomes difficult when language barriers arise, leaving one feeling isolated. In the same way, culture and religion are linked to one's identity. Individuals who migrate confront numerous challenges that might influence their mental health, such as losing religious rites, social support networks, and cultural standards; adjusting to a new society; and adjusting to identity and self-perception (Dinesh & Matthew, 2005). Even when moving from one place to another within the same state, one notices cultural differences, as India is a melting pot of cultures and religions. Learners' educational experiences will differ depending on their psychological and physical states, interactions with others, and broader institutional and environmental constraints (Hart, 2018).

Educational Migration and Gender

In patriarchal societies, women's status has always been second to men's. They are regarded as inferior to men and are assigned subordinate positions in a variety of fields and disciplines. One such field where the female gender face discrimination in terms of accessibility and opportunity is academia. Despite significant progress, large gender gaps in education persist in many settings, disproportionately affecting girls. Globally, 118.5 million girls and 125.5 million boys do not attend school. Women continue to constitute nearly two-thirds of all adults who are illiterate (UNESCO).

Higher education is critical for any country's economic, sociocultural, and human development. India has one of the world's largest higher education systems, with facilities for education and training in nearly every aspect of human creativity and intellectual endeavor (Swain, 2022). It serves as the foundation for much

modern technology as well as the source of power that makes our lives and work easier.

Gender imbalance in higher education has long been a problem in Indian society, particularly for girls from rural areas and from poorer socioeconomic origins. Over the last several decades, India has made considerable progress toward universal school attendance and established programs to address educational inequalities such as gender inequality. However, an educational gap persists (Manjulata & Sapna, 2018). Gender disparities arise as a result of traditional role expectations. Even in well-educated families, women face traditional discriminatory gender roles.

The movement of people in search of better and higher-quality education is known as educational migration. Toumanidou (2021) points out that Students perceived and used it during a period of social, political, and economic change. Education has a tremendous impact on our lives. It influences our perceptions of ourselves and our place in the universe. Females are aware of their aspirations and dreams and migrate wherever the best opportunities take them. The concentration of resources in city centres has resulted from urbanization, causing people to travel there in quest of opportunity. Students perceived and utilized educational mobility during an era of social, political, and economic change. (Toumanidou, 2021).

Neel (2021) has emphasized the various influences on educational migration, namely social, cultural, and political factors. A variety of social factors, such as age, caste, gender, and socioeconomic status, are taken into account when studying educational migration. Because primary education is more or less available throughout the country and employment possibilities take precedence over education for those over 30, young children and adults over 30 are less likely to relocate for educational reasons than youth aged 16 to 30. Despite rising numbers, there remains gender inequality and disparity in migration due to educational attainment. Today, nearly one-third of all educational institutes and four-fifths of all higher education students are enrolled in the private sector (Pande, n.d.). Consider the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa, which, in compared to those with more educated institutions (such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka), have stayed poorer. "Residents of states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have a higher rate of migration as more students leave for states with higher wages in an attempt to break the poverty cycle, resulting in states like Karnataka and Maharashtra gaining more human capital while boosting their economies" (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014). By setting international standards, providing students with access to international courses, and promoting these institutions internationally, the government has additionally encouraged international students to enroll in Indian colleges.

On the other hand, the alarming rise in youth migration rates as a result of education demanded their consideration, and these were resolved in the two subsequent five-year programs. "Higher education in India is experiencing unprecedented growth, with an explosion in the number of students, a substantial increase in the number of institutions, and a quantum jump in the level of public funding," according to the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) and the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-17) (Government of India, 2012). Governments in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka have recently entered the edu-business, establishing "Educational Cities" and "Special Education Zones" to encourage private players to enter the state's education sector, alluring more students each year (Pande, n.d.). Students assessed the city in which the institution was located in terms of living and studying costs, lifestyle, quality of life, infrastructure, employment opportunities, and other sociocultural variables in addition to university rankings (Toumanidou, 2021).

Gender relations are unequal, and women's status and role in decision-making are determined by the household. Globalization has increased the desire of all young women to pursue higher education and careers. Bindu & Selva (2011) emphasize that though globalization has impacted society, especially women, there is still a divide on the basis of the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, the English speaking and the vernacular speaking', for which the verdict is still out of the question. Peggy Froerer (2012) argues that a girl's education and aspirations are related to her chances of realizing these aspirations. The possibility of these opportunities is largely determined by social and economic constraints and conditions beyond their control. In contrast to envisioned futures connected with the pursuit of high goals and global ambitions, the concept of mobility acts as a kind of escape from societal control and roles.

Objectives

The paper aims to enlighten and break away from the general notion of migration as an unorganised sector. The Census of India captures the reasons for migration. It defines these reasons for migration as work/employment, business, education, marriage, moving after birth, moving with a household, and any other. The studies that have been done earlier talked about the socio-economic perspective of migrant women, specifically the unorganised sector's migrant women labour. Not many studies have been done to understand the standpoint of migrant female students. Thus, this paper aims to go beyond the undiscovered aspects of migration. It would discover the barriers and hurdles these migrated female students face in the new location.

Thus, this paper examines the challenges, experiences, and burdens these female student migrants face.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Robson (2002) defines it as “the philosophical, political, and theoretical foundations of social research, as well as how they affect how research is conducted and how different research methods are used.”

Since the paper's goal is to examine women's experiences with educational migration, qualitative research is being used to collect data. The paper is based on primary data gathered through interviews and google forms. A structured questionnaire was prepared for the paper with open-ended questions. The snowball sampling method is used to collect data. The study's population consists of female students who have moved to gain educational opportunities to fulfill their dreams and aspirations. The study was conducted in different cities across the country.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women are migrating to achieve their dreams and fulfill their aspirations. Education is one of the primary drivers of migration among other factors. With time, these numbers are increasing due to the unavailability of educational institutions and platforms in different locations. The 2011 Census disclosed that a total of 35,12,456 people migrated within the country for educational purposes (Neel, 2021). Middle-class groups are more likely to migrate because of education because they want to advance their education and find a white-collar job that will allow them to earn more money and ascend the socio-economic ladder (Browne, 2017).

Female students migrate to locations where opportunities are accessible to them. Women are moving away in more significant numbers in order to take advantage of higher education. This is also supported by the growing proportion of females who decide to migrate for educational purposes (Mahapatro, 2013). Whether intrastate or interstate or migrating from other countries in India, they face difficulties based on language, culture, religion, identity, etc. Women do not constitute a unified category of gender and sexual difference and thus need to be understood in terms of the various divisions like race, nation, ethnicity, class, and sexuality and in terms of the different social meanings attributed to the category through time and space (Gedalof, 1999)

Bhukra & Becker (2005) talk about how migration leads to multiple stressful experiences for migrants. These experiences include mental stress, the loss of cultural norms and religious customs, and a lack of social support systems.

Gender

Migration is a gendered process; in most cases, the mainstream explanations and experiences of men's migration can not be applied to women (Kanaipuni, 2000). Navahsree Nandini, a resident of Bihar,

experienced that “During my J-school days, reporting assignments have shown me how some things are easy for males and not for females. For example, a male is more likely to get a day-long reporting assignment for a press conference or a village than a female, unless they need a female for their appearance”.

Prachi Chauhan, who migrated to New Delhi from Rajasthan to fulfill her dream of accessing better educational opportunities, echoed the same gendered experience. “Yes, I feel that because, as a woman, there are so many social limitations that are difficult to transgress. Travelling to unknown places, ease in interacting with new people, and taking up physically tiring jobs or opportunities seem difficult for me as a woman who migrated to an unknown city.”

Arya and Roy (2006) investigated how men and women perceive their experiences in a world dominated by a single gender. Megha, who migrated from Patna to Delhi to become a lawyer, experienced her field as a male-dominated one. Every day was a challenge for her, as she reflected, “I migrated to become a practising lawyer.” This field is not only male-dominated; patriarchy reigns supreme here. Every day was a challenge; even being taken seriously was difficult. She believes 'gender equality is a far-fetched dream in the real world.

Leshini Esther Besu, who moved from Manipur to Delhi for better educational opportunities, has a different take on gendered experiences. It's hard to say. Cis-men don't appear to consider their safety (which is a huge privilege) as much as women do. But there have been historical cases of violence against men from the northeastern states by people in (what we understand as) “mainland” India. So, I cannot come to a conclusion that is exacting. However, rather than the term "opportunities", I would say they have lesser fears to be concerned about. Regarding professional opportunities (education/job), I think we Northeasterners, irrespective of our genders, have close to equal opportunities.

Saba Eram migrated to Aligarh from Lucknow for better educational opportunities, reflected on the hurdles she encountered in the new place due to the patriarchal and misogynist society and mindset of the people. She said, "Initially, I used to live in a PG where I did cooking. Whenever I had to carry the groceries, I used to go at a particular time when there was a less crowded area, especially for the men. because I felt conscious, uncomfortable, and afraid of being judged.

Stuti echoed the same gendered encounter, ‘I experienced gender bias at my university, where teachers preferred boys over girls for positions as research scholars. This discrimination harmed my abilities and potential solely because of my gender. Due to the gender barrier, my chances of being selected for research positions or receiving mentorship and support from professors may have been severely limited, impeding my academic growth and progress. Gender discrimination and being passed over for opportunities can have a significant emotional impact on an individual. It can lead to feelings of frustration, disappointment, and self-doubt, negatively impacting overall well-being. Gender discrimination and limited opportunities may have forced me to change my career path, and instead of pursuing a PhD, I chose to work as a coaching teacher near my hometown. Constantly being overlooked or undervalued can erode one's self-confidence. The gender barrier I faced might have shaken my belief in my abilities and potential, leading me to question my own worth as a researcher.’

Culture

Migration involves the loss of familiar things, including attitudes, values, and social networks. This causes cultural bereavement (Bhukra & Becker, 2005). Both the migrant and host cultures may experience changes in attitudes, family values, generational status, and social affiliations as two cultures interact during the acculturation process.

Prachi Chauhan felt the cultural barrier in terms of the value system. “As raised in a middle-class conservative family, not a lot of things were normalized, and that posed a barrier somehow because one could not easily come to terms with things one had not seen since childhood. I felt I could not fit in well in the Delhi

culture, and I experienced a constant lag in terms of things people knew there, and I did not.”

Acculturation is defined broadly as "all the changes that occur as a result of contact between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds." Acculturation has been described as a procedure influenced by particular cultural orientations, such as attitudes and actions toward the host and nation of origin cultures, and it calls for the person to be able to deal with cultural difficulties, like acculturative pressures. By recognising fundamental cultural components or deep frameworks, migrating students can learn about a culture, comprehend its inhabitants, and explain them in relation to the host culture.

Yumna Ahmad, who migrated from Patna to Delhi for better educational opportunities, says that she felt a cultural barrier in a new city. “I did not have many struggles initially when I shifted, but later I discovered a lot of stigma around the city I came from and the mindset of the people towards the same. It was a little triggering and surprising.” Cultural congruity is the alignment or dissonance between a migrant's cultural beliefs and expectations and the local population (Bhukra & Becker, 2005).

Hiba Rahman, who migrated to Aligarh from Tanda (Lucknow) to get better educational opportunities, share that the shift from the East to the West has exposed her to a vastly different cultural landscape, presenting unique difficulties. ‘One of the primary challenges I faced was the cultural barrier that often made me feel like an outsider in a new environment. Aligarh's customs, traditions, and social norms were different from what I was accustomed to in my hometown. This cultural divide sometimes led to misunderstandings and moments of discomfort. Moreover, being a woman living alone in a new city presented its own set of obstacles. I had to navigate safety concerns (which included not telling everyone where I lived) and adjust to living independently.

Regional Identity

Identity assumes a new meaning because they no longer want to be recognized only in the context of their traditional domestic roles but also in a variety of positions in society.

In response to the adaptation level, Leshini Esther Besu said, “Definitely. It was hard to force myself to fit in continuously. Often, I would have to give up on cultural choices and my language to continue being a part of a group. However, I at least had some people around me who assisted me in navigating through daily activities and understood (to some extent) why I faced difficulties. However, it was not encouraging when they expected me to fit in and go along with all that they did, while they refused even to move an inch to learn about my history and culture. There were points of time when I began to doubt my northeastern identity due to the constant thrust of an entirely different culture towards me.”

Ananya Sinha, a woman from Patna who migrated to Delhi with dreams of better education, faced discrimination because of her culture and region. She said, "Regional-wise, I was looked down upon." Coming from a small city and having a minimalistic lifestyle was once discussed. Moreover, that seemed quite odd for people there to grasp. My accent was ridiculed. And then I had to shift from 'Hum' to 'Mai'. Navashree Nandini, while sharing her identity crisis experience, says Yes, consciousness about my identity, my roots grew after I shifted to big cities. The gap was evident. My education, which was a privilege for me in my area, was not on par with that of my peers. To me, they were privileged. For example, I did not have access to the library even though I loved reading books from a young age. On the other hand, my peers had access to the best books in their schools and homes, a facility that comes in handy in big cities. So at some points, you feel super insecure and inferior.

Meenakshi Thapan (2005) highlights how identity is shaped by the feelings, wants, and longings that give each person's experience a personal touch.

Language

Navashree Nandini's experience with a language barrier is explained as, 'Yes, language is most definitely a barrier. Even if you are aware of the language, in my case, Hindi in Delhi, the tone paved the way for the initial discrimination I faced. Self-censorship also works with consciousness about one's identity (identity here means your place of birth). For example, I am from Bihar, and we in Bihar say "hum" instead of "mai". However, it almost comes naturally to most of us who migrate that we have to use "mai" for people to understand us and not be victims of mockery'.

Leshini Esther Besu's also echoed the similar expression, 'Yes. My first language is not Hindi, so fitting into a place where most of the population spoke predominantly Hindi was hard. While I understood that I would have to learn to adapt to an entirely new culture with a different language background, it did not prove easy. There were times when the professors at my institution explained their classes solely in Hindi too. Because of the language barrier, making friends and fitting in with classmates were also harder than usual. However, these were all things I expected before migrating to Delhi. One issue I faced was that many shopkeepers and auto drivers often tried to dupe people who did not speak Hindi.'

Other Experiences

As Standpoint epistemology emphasises lived experiences of individuals, how experiences within different identities produce different and unfair opportunities which cultivate distinct ways of knowing and being. Here, some of the respondents also had different experiences from the above-mentioned categories.

Ananya Sinha felt isolated while relocating to a new environment; as she said, 'Hostel wardens should be taught how to deal with students. Essential compassion and politeness are expected of them. I hope universities and landlords who are overly interested in their tenants' lives understand this concern. Other fears, anxieties, and tensions arise as a result of relocating to a new location. Initially, when people migrate, they do not have friends. Being kind would cost them nothing. As a student, these were my concerns.'

Sneha, who migrated from Sunabeda to various other places, has the opinion that it doesn't have to be a male-dominated society, which is a hurdle in your path. In my case, I would say some people (male and female) are not that cooperative with "outsiders". But others are quite good, and I can't blame all of them for it. It depends on whether you can handle it and go on your own. You chose to migrate to an unknown place, so it is better to brace yourself and be ready for the obstacles, opportunities that will come your way'.

Hiba Rahman when asked what she felt when she came to Aligarh from her hometown, she said, "Apart from being a little sad as she was leaving her parents and home, she felt independent." She pointed out that language was a barrier for her for a long time; 'the words and language here and in my hometown were different, making it difficult for me to understand and communicate with the ordinary residents.

IV. CONCLUSION

The interviewed female migrant students, with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, encountered prejudice, bias, and inequity due to their different identities. Their discriminatory experience extends to both the individual and the group/community levels. Gender, culture, region, language, and other identities intersect, resulting in unfair educational migration experiences. Acknowledging that women's experiences differ depending on their other social identities is critical. These experiences give distinct perspectives that are not mainstream notions. The viewpoint from the subordinate social location considers both sections' perspectives, i.e., their own as well as the dominant ones (Chauhan, 2022). It is essential to understand the influence and impact of language, culture, religion, and identity on female migrants.

Education is mentioned as a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution, and India's higher education sector is currently the third largest in the world. Article 13 of the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights states that "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by any appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education." The social system varies greatly across the country, encouraging women to pursue successful and independent careers in developed cities and business centres while confining them to household chores in the interior of the country.

A significant portion of student mobility occurs because desired educational opportunities are unavailable, or the quality of education provided by the home institution is insufficient (Jha & Kumar, 2017). For females to access educational opportunities, as Sancho (2017) highlights, Obtaining the financial and cultural resources necessary to fulfill one's class-based personal objectives and larger social duties at home through migrating appears as a temporary approach. Therefore, it is vital to comprehend and investigate the obstacles that female student migrants experience in taking advantage of the opportunities that are presented to them.

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