Chapter I

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1.1: Prelude

India is a multifaceted society where no generalization could apply to the nation’s various regional, religious, social and economic groups. Nevertheless certain broad circumstances in which Indian women live affect the way they participate in the society. A common denominator in their lives is that they are generally confined to home, with restricted mobility, and in seclusion. In spite of India’s reputation for respecting women, including treating her as a Goddess, history tells us that women were also ill-treated. There was no equality between men and women. They are, by and large, excluded from public life. Other, unwritten, hierarchical practices place further constraints on women. Throughout history, women have generally been restricted to the role of a home-maker; that of a mother and wife. Despite major changes that have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in India, defining activities that are deemed appropriate for women.

In the wake of massive male emigration from the country, however, the traditional household pattern has undergone changes. Household composition, income, daily activities, and even the pattern of authority and power in the household may have changed significantly. In the absence of husbands and fathers, wives and mothers may have been elevated in power within the household. Women may now feel even more challenged to make their own decisions about routine and important matters. They may now be handling more money from the remittances than ever before in their lives. In fact, some studies done in the labour exporting regions indicate that due to the long absence of their men, women have become more independent and their level of authority has risen
(Gulati, 1986; Islam & Ahmas, 1984). Some women have even assumed the role of household head (Izzard, 1982).

However, some studies indicate that in traditional societies where the predominant familial structure is based on the extended family system, the absence of some male members from households has not resulted in the transfer of household responsibilities to women. Instead, another male member in the household may assume the position of prominence (Arnold & shah, 1984; Appleyard, 1989). Consequently, the extended family system, as a social institution, may have actually been strengthened due to the compelling need for working together and sharing the benefits of migration. This is not withstanding the fact that women may have been burdened with additional responsibilities (Gulati, 1986; Islam& Ahmad, 1984; Jetley, 1984). It may also be possible that women, who in the pre migration stage were dependent upon other members of the household and the common financial resource pool, now in the wake of remittances from their men working abroad may not be constrained to stay in the extended family system for economic reasons. This independence makes them prone toward a nuclear family system, thus altering an established inter-generational relationship (Russell, 1986).

Male emigration is also associated with women’s new roles and pattern of activities in the households. In a traditional society, the woman generally does most of the household work, such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and taking care of children. Women have to work long hours due to the limited economic resources and low income of the household. Remittances play an important role in the economies of the labour-sending countries and in migrant households. In the case of India, for instance, remittances are one of the largest sources of foreign exchange earnings. They have also resulted in a phenomenal rise in the incomes of the emigrants’ households.
Increases in household income have had a definite impact on the left-pattern of women in the left-behind families. For instance, in the case of India, women in the affected households no longer need to undertake physically rigorous activities for income generation (Rahat, 1983; Abbasi & Irfan, 1986; Din & Khan, 1988). Studies indicate that women who have been affected by emigration of their male household members are no longer under pressure to work in the fields, college firework, fetch water, rear cattle and poultry, or make handicrafts. Thus, it is expected that women in some left-behind families have been released from intensive annual labour. An increase in household income has also, in many cases, put more money into the hands of women, which in turn may have helped raise their standards of living, and provided clothing, housing, and food. According to Stahl (1986), about 62 percent of the remittances are spent on basic needs and consumer durables. This use of remittances is also supported by other studies indicating that the bulk of the remittances is spent on basic consumer goods, in addition to housing, land, debt repayment, and education (Applyyard, 1989).

Another impact of emigration may be in the area of health. The health environment is likely to improve when women in migrant families have more time-having been released from involvement in income generating activities-to devote to the cleanliness of their homes and personal hygiene of their children and themselves. They may also have additional resources to spend on food, clothing, and goods required for the health and hygiene of their households, thus reducing morbidity (Shah, 1983; Bilquees & Hamid, 1981). Nevertheless, some studies do indicate that women in the left-behind nuclear families have to work harder than before as they now have to function as household heads and be independently responsible for raising their children, managing household affairs, tending live stock, and participating in agricultural activities. This is in addition to their
traditional duties such as looking after their children and the household (Youssef, Buvinic, & Kudat, 1979; Chaney, 1980; Palmer, 1985; Parveen & Hussain, 1988).

Emigration of men from the households has both positive and negative impact on the left-behind families. Some researchers argue that emigration has provided an opportunity for left-behind women to gain more independence, mobility, and decision-making power in the households. On the other hand, some studies suggest that due to emigration women are facing more hardships and extra responsibilities. To handle and manage daily affairs and other important matters, they need supervisory and managerial skills. Therefore to cope with the new challenges, women’s new roles become more stressful and physically enervating.

The absence of male members and the presence of more financial resources in the household may also induce economic independence among women, leading them to undergo a transformation of the traditional sets of values, beliefs, and attitudes. A possible outcome of this transformation may be the desire to uproot the well-established extended family system.

Migration exposes individuals to new experiences and new ideas about social, cultural, political, and economic values of the host countries, as well as to those of other emigrant co-workers from various parts of the world. During their regular visits back home migrants tend to transmit to their family members these foreign acquired experiences and ideas. They also bring back with them modern consumer goods-electronic and electric gadgets and a variety of other modern merchandise. The changed pattern of life and the exposure to new ideas and experiences may change women’s attitudes and outlooks from more traditional and conservative values in areas such as gender equality, female education, marriage age and family planning. Migration may also help to raise women’s
status by improving their health, self-esteem, and level of education. In view of these likely changes, it is important to explore in depth the various factors which may be either facilitating or constraining the changes in the lives of the left-behind women, more specifically, in the areas of decision-making, traditional roles, and attitudes.

1.2: Theoretical Framework

1.2.1: Women and Household Decision-Making Power

Making decision is part and parcel of our lives. We make decisions every day, be it related to our business enterprise, our career, or closest to us, our family life. Thus, decision-making is an important everyday agenda. Decision-making is an aspect that has long been researched by scholars from various fields. In most cases, studies have focused on decision-making in the field of management, engineering designs, business strategies and even in politics. Unfortunately, not much has been said about our everyday individual decision-making particularly among women.

According to the “theory of resources” (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), decision-making power lies in the resources each spouse brings to the household. The resources are categorized into two types, socio-economic or material resources, and personal skills or characteristics. The spouse who brings more resources to the household tends to have more decision-making power. According to Rothschild’s model (1982), there are various sources of power for women in the household. Some are derived through men while others are derived independently. The sources of women’s power generated through men are women’s fathers’ socioeconomic status, number of children, and their husbands’ socioeconomic status. The other sources of power which are not related to men are, women’s age, level of education, and their earnings from economic activities. Indicators of these resources are used in the analyses.
The household theory was an important departure from the traditional individual economic theory of migration. It recognizes that the relative control over resources by men and women has an important, and often gender differentiated impact, on family consumption and expenditures. However, it does not account for that unbalanced decision-making can occur in households. Gender inequality may influence the decision, process and effects of migration. The transnational family as a phenomenon of international migration is different to the “common household” as it has members in two households, cultures and economies at the same time. It is characterized by accompanying changes in the sexual division of labour and heads of households. Migration spurred by economic driving forces thus affects the household and gender roles.

Agarwal (1997) holds that gender dimensions are critical to bargaining outcomes and that qualitative aspect of power should be considered. Some factors affecting a person’s bargaining power are quantifiable, such as economic assets; others are less so, such as social norms and perceptions of contribution and needs. Relative bargaining power is reflected in whose interests the outcomes of the decisions represent. Outcomes are exemplified through the intra-family division of resources, goods, services and tasks, as well as the control over resources. Relative bargaining power in the family is also reflected in who takes part in decision-making and what it is about. Female respondents in decision-making concerning for example cash expenditure can be viewed as having greater bargaining strength compared to those excluded from such decision-making.
Decisions made in home management ranges in importance from major once in a lifetime. For example, choice of a marriage partner is indeed an important decision and not to be taken lightly, but it is only in fairy tales that they live happily even after (Knoll, 1973). In the upper income groups, the type of home and the duties of women may vary greatly in the conservative or traditional home and in the modern home (Megha, 1990). The authoritarian character of the traditional extended family entails decision making powers concentrated, in the position of the eldest male members (Rao, 1982). Women are traditionally less involved in decision making at all levels. Their important role is not recognized and, therefore, still not accepted in decision-making structure is still very low and their participation is mostly stressed by political parties, more as elements of their own publicity and proof of democratization, than as a real interest and need. For example, only 3 per cent women are members of political parties. They are also less active in professional associations and bodies (Solvenia, 1998). Without the active participation of women and incorporation of women’s perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals and equality development and peace cannot be achieved (Karl, 1995).

The migration of husbands brought about changes in decision making in the management of the household and in important matters for the family like purchasing an estate, education and marriage of children, and health issues. Such changes in other similar settings are also well documented in the literature. Usually, the degree of change, and more importantly the direction of change vary according to factors like the composition of the household-the family structure, the duration of husbands’ employment abroad, and the employment of women (INSTRAW, 2000).
However, the present study has proposed another source of power for women: it is the power women draw through the emigration of their husbands from the households. Emigration becomes a source of power for women because of the following factors: absence of husbands from the household, length of husband’s stay abroad, and the remittances received and control over the remittances by left-behind women.

The authority and decision-making pattern may be different in the migrant and non-migrant traditional households. In the migrant households the important sources of power for women are: absence of husbands from the households, duration of husband’s stay abroad, and the remittances. Working men send remittances, but are physically absent from the households. For practical purposes they have little control over these resources. It is either the left-behind wife, or in case of an extended family, the in-laws, who control the resources. Left-behind women are therefore in a changed situation where they have access and control over some of these resources. The present study is based on the assumption that the absence of the husband and the wife’s control over the household resources both translate into her increased decision-making power in the household. The longer the absence of husbands from the household, the greater is the decision-making power of the wife.

1.2.2: Patriarchy

Gender inequality in the family and society is perpetuated by patriarchy or the male dominated cultures. The family being primarily a unit of society and the main agent of socialization is responsible for the way girl and boy children behave (Green, 2002, 335). This is because patriarchy or the rule of father encourages the hierarchical organization of power. In most instances, the father or the male children are at the top of the hierarchy followed by the mother and then the female children.
Consequently, this results in the unequal distribution of power within the family (CCE, 2001, 4).

The concept of patriarchy has evolved from the struggles of women all over the world. It encompasses the totality of structures of Domination and Exploitation that affect women's position in society. The term patriarchy essentially means the rule of the father or the patriarch (a male member of the household or society). In feminist theory and practice, patriarchy has been looked at differently from the liberal to socialist feminism. Defined simply however, it implies a system in which the father or a male member who is considered as the head of the family, controls all economic and property resources, makes all the major decisions of the family and thereby maintains ongoing control over all members of the family and those related to it. Very clearly, this system establishes male dominance and control over women in society, in general, and particularly so within the family. The "unequal power relationship" between men and women, accrues power to men in an important institution of society. Thus, it is important to see patriarchy as both an ideology of women's subordination and control, and, a concept of struggle against the same.

Patriarchal structure has been a major feature of the traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women (Stacey, 1993; Kramarac, 1992; Lerner, 1986, Humm, 1989, and Aina, 1998). It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females. There are clearly defined sex roles, while various taboos ensure conformity with specified gender roles (Aina, 1998:6). Traditionally men do not participate in domestic work including child rearing – such tasks are considered to be the
exclusive domain of women. Males are classed as having the following qualities: strength, vigour, virile/powerful courage, self-confidence and the ability to meet the outside world i.e. animal and human intruders head on and deal with it effectively. These qualities were reflected in the kinds of work that men engaged in. Men were responsible for much of what was thought of as “heavy” labour. Men in short provided for their families (Bernard, 1981; Aweda, 1984; Carrigan et al, 1987; Stock 1995 and Silberschmidt, 1999). Women oversee the domestic chores. They kept houses, processed and cooked all foods. They also help in the planting and harvesting of food crops and cash crops. They were primarily responsible for the bearing and rearing of children from birth on; men were only called upon to assist when extraordinary discipline was considered necessary especially for the boys (Aweda, 1984:184).

1.2.3: The idea of women’s empowerment

The concept of woman’s empowerment is not recent – during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries women launched movements for liberation, suffrage and equality. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, remarked that women could not be measured by men’s standards (Lewis 2009). J.S. Mill stressed the importance of women’s education and freedom in his books Subjection of women (1869) and On liberty (1859).

Feminism is a broad social enterprise striving for equality for all as well as emphasizing the importance of values such as co-operation, tolerance, nurturance and the freedom for each person to achieve her or his potential. Despite the advances made, women are still systematically excluded from positions of power and influence. On average in North America, women who work full time still only earn 59 cents for every dollar a man makes and female college graduates statistically earn less than males with only an eighth-grade education (Drinkwater, 2005).
Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one's without power gain greater control over their lives. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly it involves at the psychological level women's ability to assert themselves and this is constructed by the 'gender roles' assigned to her specially in a cultural which resists change like India.

1.2.4: Migration as a source of Autonomy and Empowerment

Clearly, international migration may be a source of independence and bring new opportunities for self-realization. Women who migrate may be ‘freed’ of the restrictions they face in their own more traditional and patriarchal societies. As the UN World Survey poses, migration may be an “empowerment experience for women. In the process of international migration, women may move away from situations where they are under traditional, patriarchal authority to situations in which they can exercise greater autonomy over their own lives” (UN World Survey, 2004, 2). Women who migrate individually often become the breadwinners of their family and are discharged of the traditional roles running the household and raising the children. They are (physically) away from the pressures of a patriarchal society and, in the case of South to North migration, confronted with a society with different conception of gender roles.
Even when migrating together with a partner, this exposure to a different society combined with the necessities of building up a new life lead to changing structures within the family. As the Un World Survey points out, “migrant women’s employment and earnings, and their exposure to the gender relations in host societies, often instigate changes in gender relations between family members and enhance migrant women’s autonomy and empowerment” (UN World Survey, 2004, 16). It is not only women who change through the exposure to different gender relations. As Pessar and Mahler point out, “The face that some men who migrate alone and stay abroad for years learn domestic tasks by necessity and are thus more willing to assist their spouses when reunited in the host country has also been observed” (Pessar and Mahler, 2003, 826).

When women stay behind, the migration of men may also lead to a change in traditional gender roles. As the men are absent, women often have to take over roles and responsibilities which are traditionally associated with men. As Pessar and Mahler point out, “traditional” rules governing work weaken as non-migrant women and girls assume the tasks usually performed by the now-emigrant men and boys” (Pessar & Mahler, 2003, 825). Women left behind take over tasks usually performed by men, and thereby challenge the traditional sexual division of labour. Concretely, women may have to take up or increase income-generating activities when men do not send home enough remittances (UN World Survey, 2004, 16). While these additional financial responsibilities may be a source of stress, “the potential also exists for such income-generating activities to increase the autonomy and empowerment of women” (UN World Survey 2004, 16). Also, being in charge of the remittances sent back home may be a novel source of independence and power for the women left behind. Sorensen refers to a study of Ecuador, where “Remittance management has invested women with an authoritative language through which to make better claims for household needs”
(Sorensen, 2005, 6) and concludes that “male migration may lead to greater female decision making power” (Sorensen 2005, 6).

In his study of ‘Gulf wives’ in Kerala, Rajan (2003) notes this empowering potential of male migration on the women who stay behind. The absence of their husbands brings many hardships, such as loneliness and new responsibilities which may be experienced as burdens. However, it does bring many benefits as well- and not just economically. Rajan notes that the emigration of their husbands can also “give the Gulf wives an opportunity to develop their talents, expertise, status and independence to their full potential” (Rajan 2003, 19). The Kerala women had a taken up new responsibilities in their husbands’ absence, such as “responsibilities to take care of children’s education, family finances, family health, and fulfilling family obligations in social, cultural and religious area” (Rajan, 2003, 19). Especially being in charge of the remittances and managing the finances was a considerable factor in increasing the autonomy, independence and financial expertise of the women (Rajan, 2003, 20). As Rajan writes: More important than the visible economic benefits to the Gulf wives, but partly as a result of them, are the subtle changes in the women’s self-confidence and in their ability to get things done in the man’s world. Loneliness yes, mental strains yes, hard work yes, minor problems with in-laws and children yes, but at the end of the day, they would have developed an inner capacity to get things done, not only within households but also in the community. (Rajan, 2003, 21).

Rajan speaks of a real transformation, from “shy dependent girls into self confident autonomous managers with status that is equal to those of any men in the neighbourhood (Rajan, 2003, 21). primary role in family decision-making” (Rahman, 2007, 19). While local traditions and gender biases limited the possibilities for wives to invest remittances
and start a business, a special type of business names ‘dhadon’ allowed women to become independent entrepreneurs.

Forming the missing link between those formal credit institutions and the micro-credit organizations—which are often targeted specifically to the poorest of the poor, deliver only a very small amount of credit and demand a social collective responsible for repayment, and are thus not an option for a large part of the status-conscious rural population-dhadom is a lucrative business from which both the migrant women engaging in this business themselves as well as other women in the community profit. Women will come to borrow money to set up a small business, and thus it “contributes not only to the empowerment on individual migrant wives but also to rural women in general, as women borrow from other women” (Rahman, 2007, 21). As Rahman concludes, “the temporary migration of millions of male labour has induced migrant wives who are left behind to gain a variety of skills in dealing with the outside world. This will long terms social development implications for the wider Bangladeshi society (Rahman, 2007, 28).

1.2.5: Impact of Migration on Families

For families, the decision to migrate is not an easy one and often taken in response to economic hardship, as a way to deal with economic shocks as well as man-made and natural disasters. Yet migration also brings economic well-being to families. If migrants move to regions or countries with higher levels of human development than their own, as is often the case, migration can lead to improved capabilities, including better health and education, for migrants and their children. Migration can also affect gender relations and contribute to the empowerment of women, whether they migrate or stay behind.
Since migrants provide vital financial support for their families, migration can also improve the well-being of those left behind. In 2008, migrants sent $444 billion in remittances worldwide, with flows to the developing world standing at $338 billion. In some areas (e.g. the pacific islands) up to 75 percent of families report receiving remittances from overseas and in some villages remittances account for as much as 50 percent of all household income.

Financial remittances are essential for improving the livelihood of millions of people in less developed countries. Remittances improve the material welfare of family members left behind. Families with migrants tend to be better nourished and are more likely to send children to school. Remittances may also help families to diversify sources of income and provide private forms of social protection to reduce risks when facing shocks such as political conflicts or natural disasters. In countries of origin, remittances also have multiplier effects, since they will mostly be spent on goods and services supplied by others in the community and so benefit the local economy.

Families, however, are primary providers not only of material, but emotional support as well. Separation is a painful decision with important emotional costs both for those who move and for those left behind. Children’s health, education and overall development depend on the support the family is providing, going beyond monetary aspects. The migration of a parent, particularly of the mother, could offset the gains in consumption, education and health of children. The possible impacts of the absence of a parent depend on the age of the child at the time of the separation, on the familiarity and attitude of the caretaker and the duration of the separation. Research on the long-term health outcomes of separation suggests that its impacts may be negative, because the levels of preventive care are lower when one parent is absent from the household.
Moreover, a prolonged parental absence is especially difficult for children headed by single parents who migrate. The absence of a parent may result in many forms of psychological deprivation. Some national surveys indicate that the absence of both parents or just of the mother likens the frequency of depression symptoms in children. Parents’ departure also represents a risk factor for deviant behaviour among children left behind. Sometimes, even a temporary migration may have an impact similar to that of the loss of a parent, either through family break-up or death.

The impact of migration on left behind wives operates through several channels, but principally through remittances and husband-wife physical separation. Remittances bring in considerable income to the left behind wives and their households. Increase in income leads to several changes in their lifestyle and consumption patterns. Changes would be discernible in ownership of land, housing and household amenities, nutritional and health status of the members of the households, social status as reflected in the relationship of the family and the community, and the quality of education of their children. Women who had earlier been accustomed to protected lifestyle are called upon to take charge of a number of household tasks, within the house and outside it, to which they had never been exposed before their husband’s migration. Women who had been unaccustomed to handling large sums of money would become responsible for the financial management of the household. They would be required to open bank accounts, and approach public offices for a variety of purposes. Women who succeed in taking on the additional responsibilities develop new expertise and grow in self-confidence. They become more independent and rise in social status. Those who fail to rise to the occasion incur the displeasure of their husbands and other members of their families and even social and psychological problems. Thus, the impact of migration on women can be either positive
or negative or both depending on her ability and background as well as the family environment in which she is placed.

1.2.6: Migration and Left behind Women

When men migrate, are the women left behind empowered? Men migrating may bring about changes in the gender division of labour, including feminization of agriculture and an increase in women’s workload (Croll and Huang, 1997). Men migrating may also mean women left behind have a greater role in household decision-making, or greater interdependence with the extended family. Women may gain autonomy through absence of men, however they may also be left with greater stresses and vulnerability, and an increased workload. If remittances are sent to women family members, this may increase their status and control. However, this may not occur if bank accounts are handled by a male relative. Migration of men may affect cultural norms in the household, to women’s benefit or detriment. Where men have migrated from Muslim communities in South Asia to the Middle East they and their households have at times adopted more orthodox Muslim customs to show their increased status and association with the richer Middle East, which has resulted in an increase in seclusion of women in their families.

International migration frequently results in the separation of family members, which in turn creates a greater dependence on the nuclear family, weakening wider kinship relationships and consequently widening the roles of nuclear family members, especially women. Families of international migrants are placed in a vulnerable situation, as those “left behind”, particularly dependent members, confront social and emotional consequences. The women left behind face many hardships, from loneliness and isolation to financial difficulties. An extended period of family separation has a number of detrimental effects, such as a higher incidence of mental disorder among women and
children, lower levels of school performance and impeded social and psychological development among children, and the abandonment of the elderly. One of the consequences of the prolonged absence of migrants from the family has been marital instability and the consequent break-up of the family unit, leading to a higher incidence of divorce among migrant households (Hugo, 2002).

However, it has been argued that, in some contexts, the families left behind have benefited in a number of ways from international migration. Families have adopted more modern patterns of living. Remittances have provided a source of income for families who have no job opportunities. Studies have found that many families use remittances to build new houses and educate children, while small proportions of migrants use their savings to start small-scale businesses.

Migration has also resulted in an improvement in the economic and social situation of women within the family and the community. There is evidence that, while male relatives remaining in the village may retain overall control, male labour migration has led to an improvement in the status of the women left behind (ESCAP, 2001). While migrants experience both positive and negative effects, even women migrants in highly vulnerable and exploitative situations often indicate that migration has improved their autonomy in some areas of their lives (Hugo, 2002).

1.2.7: Role of family system on left-behind women

The family system also plays an important role with regard to the impact of emigration on left-behind women. It is an important cultural institution which has a significant impact on the lives of family members in relation to their economic and social roles inside the outside the household. The extended family system, which is prevalent in Asian
countries, has a hierarchical authority pattern, shared rights, obligations and dependence of family members on each other (Blood & Wolfe, 1960).

The family system influences women’s position, and its alternation, in the household. Women’s power within the family depends significantly on family structure. Extended families tend to have a hierarchical set up in which men usually dominate and women are relegated to the lower end of the hierarchy which, in turn, puts them in a more subordinate position (whyte, 1978). Studies done in patriarchal societies have found that wives in nuclear families have greater power than wives in extended families, and wives may also be under more supervision in extended families, especially in patrilocal extended families (Lee & Lee, 1986).

Women in more traditional extended families tend to have very limited control over decisions affecting their lives and resources. Within more extended households women, despite the migration of their husbands, may not experience significant changes in their decision-making and authority patterns. Nonetheless, it is likely that women acquire and assimilate new ideas from their husbands, as well as experience changed economic conditions in the household. These factors are likely to have a negative relationship with the extended family ties.

Migration potentially exposes the individual to new experiences and new ideas about social, cultural, political, and economic values of the host countries as well as those of the other emigrant coworkers from various parts of the world. Therefore emigration becomes a potential source for the transference of more “modern ideas” from the more cosmopolitan, heterogeneous international setting to the developing, traditional world. Migrants also influence traditional beliefs and values by transmitting their new ideas and
experience to their family members back home. It is expected that such transference inevitably leads to more awareness and a better life.

The changed environment and circumstances due to emigration of husbands from households provide a new venue for the left-behind women. They are likely to be relatively more unrestricted, self assured, and independent. In fact, an Indian study confirms that male emigration has had major impacts on women in the left-behind families (Raj & Shubhada, 1988). This study showed that women were increasingly becoming more self-reliant and had a greater sense of contact with the outside world brought about by the necessity for them to manage financial affairs. They had more freedom to make their own decisions, and found increased opportunities for dealing with various agencies.

Our important impact of emigration is expected to be a change in women’s roles and status within the left-behind families. After all, women’s roles and status are largely determined by their economic situation within their families. As a consequence of male emigration, the economic situation of women in the left-behind families has undoubtedly improved. This in turn has helped to raise women’s status within the communities of their residence. Higher status is often accompanied by a concomitant change in the role of these women. For instance, these women are more likely to perform less strenuous and non-domestic activities.

Division of labour in a typical Indian family is tied to religious, economic, and kinship structures, which define the social roles of men and women. These roles can be categorized into activities which occur both inside and outside the household. Women are usually associated with household activities. Men, on the other hand, are mainly responsible for activities outside the household. However, this division of labour is not
sharply defined, as men and women overlap in the performance of their traditionally assigned roles and responsibilities. (Rahman, 1987; Kishwar, 1966).

1.2.8: Factors facilitating/constraining on left-behind women

In the context of emigration and its impact on left-behind women, the following factors emerge as significantly important for the present study: (a) absence of husband from the household (b) duration of husband’s absence, (c) remittances sent back to the household by the husband and their impact on women’s daily household activities, and (d) the family structure. It can be hypothesized that the absence of husbands from the households leads to changes in the roles and in the decision-making power of the left behind-women. Long absence and increased income in households are expected to have a positive relationship with left-behind women’s decision-making power and authority.

A factor which may mitigate the effects of absence and remittances in the changing situation for women is the extent of contact the migrant husbands have with the left-behind women. It is expected that if the level of contact is low, women may attain more decision-making power and take on new roles and responsibilities, and vice versa. The presence of remittances has a positive impact on the daily activities of the left-behind women by reducing the economic hardship of the family and liberating them from taking strenuous jobs need for the upkeep of the family.

The family system is considered to be an important factor in determining women’s decision-making power in the household. It is believed that the family’s “extendedness” is inversely related to the individual’s decision-making power within the household. Women in more traditional extended families tend to have more limited control over decisions affecting their lives and resources. Within more extended households women,
despite the migration of their husbands, may not have experienced significant changes in their decision-making and authority patterns. Nevertheless, it is likely that women will acquire and assimilate new ideas from their husbands, as well as experience changed economic conditions in the household. These factors are likely to have a negative relationship with extended family ties.

Women’s age, number of children, and women’s fathers’, socio-economic status are expected to be positively related to women’s decision-making power in the household. The educational level of wife may also play a significant role insofar as education may give women increased awareness and lead to higher decision-making power for them in the family. On the other hand, the husband’s education may contribute to higher wages or to more frequent visits with the family, which may have either a positive or negative effect on women’s role and responsibilities in the family. Women’s age is likely to contribute positively to her decision-making power. It is suggested by the relevant research that older women have more say in family matters due to their age and the number of children. With the passage of time, family size increases and children also become older. Therefore older women seek support from their children and make more decisions regarding family matters.

1.3: Problem of the Study

Since the early 1970’s, thousands of Indian men have migrated to the oil-rich, but labour-scarce, Middle Eastern countries. According to one estimate, there were 3, 55,164 Indian workers in the Middle East in 1998 (GOI, 1998). Most of these migrants, who are from rural areas and poor families, are in the age group of 20-35 years. The majority of these emigrants is married and has left their families behind. These migrant workers also regularly remit their earnings back to their families. The emigration of Middle Eastern
countries totally changed the socio-economic conditions of certain regions in India. This phenomenon of emigration has had a profound socioeconomic impact both on the people and the country of India (Zachariah, 2000).

Hence, this study has examined the impact of male migration on left-behind women in Melaplayam-South-Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. The main focus of the study is on the status of women and women’s power within emigrant households. More specifically, the study has taken into account the woman’s decision-making power, her activity profile with regard to division of labour in the household, and her attitudes relating to gender equity, education, family planning, and marriage age, within that group of women left behind as a consequence of male migration. This study is an attempt to determine some of the constraining or facilitating factors like husband’s absence and its duration, the extent of migrant’s contact with his home and the type of family system in which the wife resides in the impact of emigration on the left-behind women.

1.4: Significance of Study

According to a 2000 World Bank study, women in India generally have low status, low education, fewer and more limited employment opportunities, restricted mobility, very little control over resources, low decision-making power, limited awareness of their civil rights, a poor self concept, limited awareness of their civil rights, a poor self concept, and few aspirations (World Bank Country Report, 2000). Societal inequality and discrimination against women have generally deprived them of their right to a better life. This in turn has become a critical drawback in the social and economic development of the country. For national development to move forward, it is critical to change the conditions of Indian women. Effects are needed to educate and train them and utilize their potential more fully.
The majority of the developing countries are making efforts through their development policies to improve the social and economic well-being of their people, including women. One such policy is to encourage male out-migration to urban centers within the country and to the industrialized nations. The migration of men for work, and consequent increases in household income, is one of the major means through which left-behind women benefit by improving their status and well being. It is quite likely that without breaking away from existing values and traditions women from migrant households may find access to and control over the resources, and may also acquire greater decision-making power in households.

This study’s significance lies in its attempt to assess the intended, as well as unintended, consequences of male migration on the left-behind women. It examines the factors which help to change women’s socioeconomic well-being in the household. The study may help in developing family impact statements which may influence and guide prevailing as well as future policies, planning and project designs, programmes, and laws which deal with family and family members, especially women.

The review of the relevant literature suggests that migration of male members and the influx of remittance in migrant households have had socioeconomic impacts on the left-behind families. The majority of the existing research, however, mainly emphasizes the economic consequences of migration. Only limited attention has been focused on the consequences of migration for women in the left-behind families. Many questions remain unanswered or only partially answered. For instance, some of the unanswered questions are: how has migration affected the structure and organization of the families; has migration given women greater freedom in decision-making; has migration brought about significant changes in women’s position and power in the family; and has migration
affected the traditional division of labour among members of the left-behind families? In addition, there are number of unanswered questions related to the effects of causal influences on families and women’s role and status.

1.5: Objectives

1.5.1: Main objective

The main objective of the study is to find out the changing status and power of left behind women

1.5.2: Specific Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the sample households.
2. To explore the impact of male emigration on the attitude of left behind women.
3. To assess the impact of male emigration on the decision-making power of left behind women.
4. To find out the activity profiles of the women in the sample households.
5. To determine the constraining or facilitating factors in the impact of male migration on the left-behind women.

1.6: Hypotheses

Based on the survey of research on migration and gender analysis, this study tested the following hypotheses which linked antecedent factors to influence decision-making power and roles of women.
Hypotheses of the studies are:

(a) Migrant status and duration of husband’s stay abroad have a positive relationship with women’s decision-making power;

(b) The level of contact between husbands and left-behind wives, as well as the extended family system, has negative relationships with women’s decision-making power;

(c) Duration of husbands’ absence from households has a positive effect on women’s attitudes; and

(d) Left-behind women perform more non-traditional and less strenuous activities than women in non-migrant households.

1.7: Limitation of the study

Although the study has reached its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations.

1. The researcher has concentrated only on Tirunelveli district, especially on Melapalayam-South area, where male emigration has numerically higher in Tamil Nadu.

2. This study was conducted only on a small size of population who were migrated to Middle East countries.

Therefore to generalize the results for larger groups, the study should have involved more respondents at different areas.
1.8: Definition of terms used

Access

Access to resources implies that women are able to use and benefit from specific resources (material, financial, human, social, political, etc).

Attitude

A predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation. Attitude influences an individual's choice of action, and responses to challenges, incentives, and rewards (together called stimuli).

Benefits

Economic, social, political and psychological retributions derived from the utilization of resources, including the satisfaction of both practical needs (food, housing) and strategic interests (education and training, political power).

Control

Control over resources implies that women can obtain access to a resource as and can also make decisions about the use of that resource. For example, control over land means that women can access land (use it), can own land (can be the legal title-holders), and can make decisions about whether to sell or rent the land.

Development

Improvement in human well-being—both economic and social. Includes but is not limited to poverty reduction.
Decision-Making

The thought process of selecting a logical choice from the available options. When trying to make a good decision, a person must weight the positives and negatives of each option, and consider all the alternatives. For effective decision making, a person must be able to forecast the outcome of each option as well, and based on all these items, determine which option is the best for that particular situation.

External Migration

Moving to a new home in a different state, country, or continent.

Emigration

A person who is leaving a country to reside in another.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a process which change existing power relations by addressing itself to three dimensions-material, human and intellectual resources. It is a process which must challenge and change ideology, the set of ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices in which gender bias or social bias like caste, class, regionalism and communalism are embedded.

Gender

Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.
**Gender Equality**

Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

**Gender Equity**

Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This includes equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

**Gender analysis**

The systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and social relations in order to identify understand and redress inequalities based on gender.

**Gender discrimination**

The systematic, unfavorable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies them rights, opportunities or resources.

**Gender division of labour**

The socially determined ideas and practices which define what roles and activities are deemed appropriate for women and men.
Impact

Measures of the tangible and intangible effects (consequences) of one things or entity’s action or influence upon another.

Internal Migration

Moving to a new home within a state, country, or continent.

Extended family

Extended family, constitutes all first blood relatives living under the same roof. This includes all first cousins and their respective hierarchical generations.

Left –behind Women

Wives whose husbands have migrated to other countries

Migration

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another place.

Nuclear family

Nuclear family is simply defined be a social unit with a mother, father and children and a pet being the key constituents.

Patriarchy

Systemic societal structures that institutionalize male physical, social and economic power over women.
**Push Factors**

Reasons for emigrating (leaving a place) because of a difficulty (such as a food shortage, war, flood, etc.).

**Pull Factors**

Reasons for immigrating (moving into a place) because of something desirable (such as a nicer climate, better food supply, freedom, etc.).

**Resources**

Resources are means and goods, including those that are economic (household income) or productive (land, equipment, tools, work, credit); political (capability for leadership, information and organization); and time.

**Sex**

Sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive as there are individuals who possess both, but these characteristics tend to differentiate humans as males and females.

**Women empowerment**

A ‘bottom-up’ process of transforming gender power relations, through individuals or group developing awareness of women’s subordination and building their capacity to challenge it.
1.9: Chapter Organization

The study has been divided into SEVEN Chapters.

- The first chapter consisted of theoretical framework, objectives, significance of study, problem of the study, hypotheses and limitation of the study.

- The second chapter reviews the evolution of women’s developmental concerns, describe the context of patriarchy planning and review the literature

- The third chapter describes the Methodology adopted for the study.

- The fourth and fifth chapters carry the analysis of the research study and provide the results and discussions.

- Sixth chapter consists of Case studies carried out among the left-behind women.

- Seventh chapter deals a concluding chapter, summing up the findings and ending with a number of policy recommendations.