

Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Nepalese Women Migrant Workers in India: A Sociological Study of Lakhimpur Kheri

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Abstract-

This study is an attempt to understand the socio-economic challenges faced by Nepalese women migrant workers in India, with a particular focus on Lakhimpur Kheri, a district of UP, with the Nepal border. Based on a mixed-methods research approach, including questionnaires, interviews, and field observations, this study examines how these women navigate cultural and institutional barriers in India. Utilizing a sociological lens, the paper examines the complex interplay of migration and labour, highlighting the experiences of Nepali women who migrate to seek better livelihood opportunities. These women workers face challenges based on economic instability, gendered discrimination, insecure working conditions, and lack of access to social protections and rights. Drawing data from their migrant status, supported by language barriers and limitations on healthcare, education, and other essential services. The analysis draws on feminist theories and the labour migration framework to unravel the structure of inequalities embedded in the migration process. This study examines how these women navigate cultural and institutional barriers in India, while also confronting socio-economic pressures from their communities back home. The research aims to illuminate the intersection of migration, gender, and socio-economic marginalization, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of transnational labour movements within the socio-political context of female migration in South Asia. The findings emphasize the need for policy measures to address the vulnerabilities of Nepalese women migrant workers in India.

Keywords: Nepalese women migrant workers, socio-economic challenges, economic instability, insecure working conditions, language barriers, healthcare access, education limitations, transnational labour movements, socio-economic marginalization, female migration.

Introduction-

Migration is an inevitable phenomenon in the 21st century. International labour migration from Nepal has been quite diverse in terms of the nature of work. Those forms range from military recruitment to domestic labour (Kansakar, 2003). However, the history of Nepali migration to India is sketchy and incomplete because the open border and the lack of a registration system make it difficult to establish the size of labour migration (Subedi, 2002). It is found that the destination of major Nepali migrants was initially to India, which has now expanded to almost all countries. Migration between Nepal and India is the result of various social and political agreements between the two countries. It is not merely the physical movement of people from one place to another but also a sociological phenomenon. It reflects economic conditions, social

structures, cultural interactions, and political relations of people. The 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty between Nepal and India facilitates the movement of people between these two countries. Maintaining the open border between Nepal and India is a legacy of the shared culture of the colonial past (Bashyal, 2014). It has been said that the open border between Nepal and India is not only the outcome of security needs and political and historical reasons, but also a necessity for each country. Considering the geographic situation of Nepal and India, an open border facilitates the movement of people from one country to another, also supporting their economic and religious needs (Rajbahak, 1992). One of the primary reasons for migration is employment, and migrants pursuing this purpose are referred to as labour migrants (LMs) or migrant workers. Among the various forms of migration between India and Nepal occupies a unique place is occupied due to the historical, cultural, and political ties shared by the two countries. Migration is a cross-cultural and historical phenomenon; it contributes to human livelihood. Due to poverty, unemployment, declining natural resources, and the Maoist insurgency, labour migration has become an important livelihood strategy in Nepal. Migration to India has a long history (Kansakar, 2003). The open border agreement facilitated by the Indo-Nepal treaty of Peace and Treaty of 1950 has made it possible for citizens of both nations to cross borders freely for employment, education, trade, and settlement. This special agreement has resulted in the long-standing tradition of Nepali workers migrating to different parts of India in search of better livelihood opportunities.

India has historically served as a significant host destination for Nepali labour migration. Among these migrants, Nepalese women have emerged as a notable demographic, particularly in neighbouring India due to cultural and geographical proximity, the open border, and lower travel costs. Unlike male migrants, who often find employment in construction or skilled labour, Nepalese women predominantly work in domestic service, caregiving, and the informal sector, where they are vulnerable to exploitation. Women migrants, in particular, experience a double burden. They not only work in low-paying jobs but are also subjected to gender discrimination, workplace harassment, and domestic responsibilities, which limit their upward mobility. While their remittances contribute to Nepal's economy, they face socio-economic challenges that impede their development, with limited pathways for personal and professional growth.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the socio-economic challenges faced by Nepali migrant workers in Lakhimpur Kheri through a sociological lens. It aims to analyse their working conditions, income level, access to resources, social integration, and overall quality of life. It also explores how caste, class, gender, and cultural identity influence their experiences of migration. By focusing on both structural factors (such as labour market dynamics, state policies, and border relations) and lived realities (such as exploitation, discrimination, and coping mechanisms), the study intends to present a holistic picture of migration in this borderland region. In conclusion, the migration of Nepali workers to India is not merely a question of mobility but one of survival, identity, and dignity. The socio-economic challenges they face highlight the contradictions of migration: while it provides opportunities for income and substance, it simultaneously produces vulnerabilities and exclusions. A sociological study of Lakhimpur Kheri thus becomes essential to understand these dynamics, bringing to light broader themes of labour, inequality, and cross-border relations in South Asia.

Theoretical background-

Migration is not only a demographic or economic phenomenon; it is deeply rooted in social, cultural, and structural processes that shape people's mobility, settlement, and struggles. Understanding the socio-economic challenges of Nepali migrant workers in India, particularly in the border district of Lakhimpur Kheri, requires engagement with a range of classical and contemporary sociological theories. These perspectives not only explain why migration occurs but also bring light to how migrants are positioned within labour markets, social hierarchies, and transnational networks. Classical migration theory dates back to the works of Ernst Ravenstein (1885), who proposed the "laws of migration." Ravenstein observed that migration often takes place over short distances and is primarily driven by economic motives. His ideas remain relevant for the Nepali case, where geographical proximity, cultural ties, and open borders between India and Nepal sustain long-standing migration flows. However, as scholars like Skeldon (1997) note, migration is not simply about economics; it also involves questions of belonging, cultural integration, and identity. These elements are particularly visible in Indo-Nepal migration, where centuries of shared history and kinship shape mobility patterns.

From a Marxist perspective, migration is closely tied to capitalist exploitation and class relations. Karl Marx (1976) argued that capitalism thrives on the extraction of surplus value from labour, especially by exploiting marginalized groups who lack bargaining power. Nepali migrants, many of whom come from poor rural backgrounds, are incorporated into the unorganized sectors of India's economy, where they provide cheap, flexible, and easily disposable labour. Lenin (1964) extended this argument with the idea of the "reserve army of labour," describing how surplus workers are used to depress wages and weaken labour's bargaining power. Nepali migrants in Lakhimpur Kheri embody this dynamic, as their vulnerability makes them attractive to employers seeking to cut costs. Dependency theorists such as Frank (1967) further emphasize how migration from peripheral economies like Nepal to semi-peripheral economies like India reproduces patterns of underdevelopment. Migrants provide essential labour to India, while remittances to Nepal are often insufficient to significantly change their families' economic conditions, thereby perpetuating dependency. Structural functionalist theorists such as Parsons (1951) and Davis (1965) interpret migration differently. For them, migration is a functional necessity, balancing labour shortages and surpluses across regions. By this logic, Nepali workers migrating to India contribute positively by meeting labour demand in agriculture, forestry, and services in districts like Lakhimpur Kheri. This perspective highlights how migration contributes to equilibrium in both sending and receiving regions, reducing unemployment in Nepal while supplying needed labour in India. However, functionalist perspectives are limited because they often overlook issues of inequality and exploitation. As Massey et al. (1993) argue, while migration may fulfill functional needs for economies, migrants themselves often face exclusion from social services, legal protections, and welfare schemes, which undermines the "balanced" picture painted by functionalism.

On a global scale, migration can be understood through Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) world-systems theory, which situates mobility within the capitalist world economy. Wallerstein distinguishes between core, semi-periphery, and periphery regions, with labour often flowing

from the periphery to the core. In this framework, Nepal is a peripheral country supplying cheap labour, while India is positioned as a semi-periphery that benefits from this labour pool. Scholars such as Sassen (1988) have further shown how global capital and labour flows reproduce inequalities, where migrants become essential to the economy but remain marginalized socially and politically. This lens helps situate Nepali migration to India as part of broader regional and global structures of dependency and inequality.

Economic theories of migration also provide insight. The neoclassical theory, articulated by Todaro (1969), suggests that individuals migrate to maximize income by moving from low-wage to high-wage areas. For Nepali workers, India presents higher wage opportunities compared to Nepal's rural agrarian economy. Yet this theory has been criticized for treating migration as a purely individual economic decision, ignoring household strategies and social networks. The new economics of migration (Stark & Bloom, 1985) addresses this limitation by emphasizing migration as a collective household decision aimed at minimizing risks and diversifying income sources. Families in Nepal send members to India not only to earn wages but also to hedge against uncertainties in agriculture and rural livelihoods. This explains the persistence of Nepali migration across generations, as remittances become a critical lifeline for households.

Migration scholars also highlight the role of social networks and systems in sustaining migration. According to Massey et al. (1998), migration becomes self-perpetuating once networks of kinship, friendship, and community ties are established. For Nepali migrants, networks in Lakhimpur Kheri provide access to jobs, housing, and basic support, lowering the costs and risks for newcomers. Mabogunje's (1970) migration systems theory complements this view by explaining how migration between two regions becomes institutionalized over time, supported by social and economic structures. The Indo-Nepal migration corridor, sustained by open borders and historical patterns of movement, is a classic example of a migration system that reproduces itself through networks and institutions.

Theories of capital also shed light on migrant experiences. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized different forms of capital- economic, social, and cultural. He also talks about the concept of habitus, which shapes people's dispositions and practices. Nepali migrants generally lack economic and cultural capital, such as formal education, skills, or recognized qualifications, which restrict them to low-paying jobs in India. However, they compensate through social capital, relying on networks of fellow migrants and kinship ties to secure work and survive. Human capital theory, developed by Becker (1993), reinforces this by showing how a lack of skills and education limits upward mobility. In the case of Nepali workers, their limited human capital explains why they remain trapped in precarious labour markets. Migration is also a gendered process, as feminist scholars have emphasized. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) demonstrated how women's experiences of migration differ from men's, with women often concentrated in domestic work and informal sectors where exploitation is rampant. Nepali women migrants in India face multiple vulnerabilities: they are underpaid, subjected to harassment, and burdened with domestic responsibilities. Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Crenshaw (1989), helps explain these overlapping forms of oppression, as women face discrimination not only due to gender but also class, ethnicity, and migrant status.

Pessar and Mahler (2003) argue that migration transforms gender relations within households and communities, but often in ways that reinforce patriarchal structures, as women's contributions are undervalued despite their economic roles.

Bourdieu's broader framework of social reproduction is also applicable here. Migrants' habitus, shaped by rural poverty and limited education, restricts their ability to navigate India's social and institutional systems. Their children often inherit these disadvantages, facing barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and social mobility. In this sense, inequalities are reproduced across generations, ensuring that Nepali migrants remain on the margins of Indian society. The concept of structural violence, developed by Galtung (1969), provides another lens for understanding the challenges faced by Nepali migrants. Structural violence refers to systemic inequalities embedded in social institutions that prevent people from meeting their basic needs. For Nepali workers in Lakhimpur Kheri, structural violence manifests in the form of exploitative labour practices, exclusion from welfare schemes, and lack of access to healthcare and education. Silver's (1994) theory of social exclusion complements this perspective by explaining how marginalized groups are systematically denied participation in economic, political, and social life. Nepali migrants, despite their long-standing presence in India, remain excluded from formal recognition and welfare systems, making them invisible in policy frameworks.

Finally, contemporary migration theories emphasize transnationalism, which highlights how migrants maintain ties across borders. Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994) describe how transnational migrants sustain connections with their homeland while integrating into the host country. Nepali migrants in Lakhimpur Kheri exemplify this, as they continue to send remittances, maintain family ties, and uphold cultural traditions in Nepal even while working in India. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue that transnational migrants exist in overlapping social fields, creating hybrid identities that are neither fully rooted in the sending nor the receiving country. This sense of in-betweenness complicates the experiences of Nepali migrants, as they remain marginal in India while simultaneously disconnected from Nepal due to prolonged absences. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analysing the socio-economic challenges of Nepali migrant workers in India. Marxist and world-systems theories highlight structural exploitation and dependency, while functionalist and economic perspectives explain labour supply and demand dynamics. Network and systems theories show how migration persists through social ties, while Bourdieu's concepts of capital and social reproduction illustrate how inequalities are maintained across generations. Feminist and intersectional approaches reveal the gendered nature of migration, while structural violence and exclusion theories highlight systemic marginalization. Transnationalism, finally, captures the dual identity and ongoing cross-border connections of migrants. In conclusion, migration must be understood not simply as movement but as a social process embedded in structures of inequality, shaped by networks, and influenced by global economic systems. For Nepali migrant workers in Lakhimpur Kheri, challenges like low wages, exploitation, social exclusion, and identity issues can be better understood through a mix of different theories. This kind of approach helps show that migration is complex and connects the everyday struggles of Nepali workers to larger issues of labour, inequality, and cross-border movement in South Asia.

Literature Review-

Migration has been a central theme in sociological and economic studies, particularly focusing on the experiences of vulnerable groups such as women. The migration of Nepalese women to India, especially to border regions like Lakhimpur Kheri, presents a unique case for studying socio-economic challenges. Migration studies often highlight the gendered nature of migration, where women face distinct challenges compared to men. The study of socio-economic challenges faced by Nepalese women migrant workers in India, particularly in the border district of Lakhimpur Kheri, requires an understanding of the unique historical and geographical context of Indo-Nepal migration. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship established an open border between India and Nepal, which continues to shape migration patterns today. Lakhimpur Kheri, being one of the largest districts situated along this open border, has become a significant corridor for Nepalese migrants. Many of these migrants are women seeking work in agriculture, domestic labour, and informal service sectors.

Morokvasic (1984), in her study “Birds of passage are also women”, introduced the concept of “feminization of migration,” emphasizing the growing participation of women in migration flows. Castles & Miller (2009) point out that Women migrants, especially from economically weaker backgrounds, are often employed in informal and unregulated sectors, exposing them to precarious working conditions and exploitation. Chant and Radcliffe (1992) argue that gender dynamics influence not only the reasons for migration but also the experiences at the destination. For Nepalese women, these dynamics are further compounded by cultural expectations and patriarchal norms that limit their mobility and decision-making power, both in Nepal and in India. The open border policy between Nepal and India facilitates large-scale migration, with Nepalese citizens seeking better economic opportunities in India. Studies by Sharma and Thapa (2013) and Sijapati and Limbu (2012) suggest that Nepalese migrants frequently engage in low-skilled and informal employment, including domestic work, agricultural labour, and construction.

Women migrants are disproportionately employed in domestic and caretaking roles. Lakhimpur Kheri, due to its proximity to Nepal, serves as a major destination for Nepalese migrant workers. However, the socio-economic infrastructure in this region is underdeveloped, creating additional hurdles for women migrants. The report of the ILO (2016) points out that women migrants predominantly work in informal sectors, where wage disparities, long working hours, and lack of job security are prevalent. For Nepalese women in India, these challenges are increased by their undocumented status and making them vulnerable to exploitation by employers and labour contractors. Sijapati et al. (2017) note that many Nepalese women workers are unaware of their rights, which allows employers to exploit their labour without accountability. Wage theft and withholding of salaries are common injustices among this group. Studies have consistently highlighted the high prevalence of gender-based violence faced by migrant women. Joshi (2020) points out that Nepalese women in India often encounter harassment in workplaces and public spaces. The lack of legal documentation further prevents them from seeking legal recourse. Cultural stereotypes and xenophobia also contribute to the discrimination against Nepalese migrants, who are often perceived as “outsiders” or economically inferior. Migrant women face significant barriers in accessing healthcare,

including reproductive and maternal care. Adhikari et al. (2011) found that Nepalese women migrants are less likely to seek medical help due to financial constraints, language barriers, and fear of deportation. These challenges are particularly acute in rural regions like Lakhimpur Kheri, where healthcare infrastructure is already strained. Migration has a dual impact on families: while it provides economic relief through remittances, it often disrupts familial structures and caregiving roles. Thieme & Wyss (2005) point out that Nepalese women migrants in India often leave behind children and elderly family members, creating emotional stress and a sense of disconnection.

Lakhimpur Kheri, a district in Uttar Pradesh, is characterized by agricultural dominance and socio-economic disparities. The region has a significant population of Nepalese migrants, but limited attention has been given to their integration and well-being. According to Singh and Mishra (2019), Nepalese migrant women in Lakhimpur Kheri often live in marginalized conditions, lacking access to education, healthcare, and social security. Rai (2021) also points out that the cultural and linguistic similarities between Nepal and northern India can sometimes ease integration, but they also obscure the specific vulnerabilities of Nepalese women migrants, making their challenges less visible in policy discourse.

The absence of formal agreements between Nepal and India regarding labour migration makes the vulnerabilities of Nepalese workers worse. Despite the open border policy, there is no mechanism to regulate employment or ensure the protection of migrant workers' rights. According to the ILO (2018), the lack of bilateral agreements leads to a regulatory vacuum, particularly affecting informal labour sectors where women are overrepresented. The Indian government has implemented various schemes for labour welfare, but these often exclude undocumented migrants. Similarly, Nepal's policies for migrant protection largely focus on workers migrating to the Gulf countries, neglecting those who move to India.

While there is substantial research on the Nepal-India migration corridor, specific studies focusing on Nepalese women migrants in rural regions like Lakhimpur Kheri are limited. Existing studies also lack intersectional analyses that consider caste, class, and ethnicity alongside gender. Over and above that, there is little exploration of the coping strategies employed by these women to navigate socio-economic challenges. Additionally, social expectations and family pressures influence women's choices, often compelling them to remit a large portion of their earnings to support families back home, sometimes at the cost of their own welfare and savings. Theoretical frameworks, such as the feminization of labour migration, illustrate that gender roles continue to shape migration patterns and experiences. This literature review thus highlights a critical gap in understanding the intersectional issues affecting Nepalese women migrant workers.

Methodology-

This research adopts a qualitative approach to capture the lived experiences of Nepalese women migrant workers in India. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 Nepalese women working in various sectors in Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh. In addition to interviews, focus group discussions were conducted with Nepalese migrant associations in India to gain insights into collective experiences and survival strategies. Secondary data,

including reports from NGOs and policy papers from the Nepalese and Indian governments, were analysed to contextualize the socio-economic challenges and their implications for development.

Findings and Discussion-

The study of Nepalese women migrant workers in Lakhimpur Kheri reveals that migration, while providing economic opportunities, also exposes them to multiple socio-economic vulnerabilities shaped by gender, class, and borderland dynamics. Situated along the porous Indo-Nepal border, Lakhimpur Kheri becomes both a source of livelihood and a site of exploitation for women migrants, who often take up low-paying jobs in agriculture, domestic service, construction, and petty trade. Secondary data indicate that these occupations are predominantly informal, lacking contracts, wage security, or social protection, which leaves women in precarious conditions. Gendered labour discrimination further exacerbates their situation, as women are often paid less than men for similar work and remain dependent on informal contractors who frequently engage in exploitative practices. Nepalese women migrant workers often face economic exploitation in the form of low wages, non-payment, and poor working conditions. Most women are employed in informal jobs that lack job security, leaving them vulnerable to labour rights violations. Employers frequently capitalize on their limited bargaining power, and there is little recourse for wage theft or mistreatment. The absence of formal contracts and the undocumented status of many migrant workers mean that they are outside the protection of labour laws in both Nepal and India. While Nepal and India share an open border agreement, this arrangement does not provide specific labour protections for migrant workers. Nepalese women are therefore left with little legal recourse if they experience exploitation or abuse. Cultural and language barriers, combined with the stigma associated with migrant labour, often result in social isolation for Nepalese women in India. Many report feeling alienated from both Indian society and their families back home. This isolation not only impacts their mental health but also limits their access to networks that could support economic and social mobility. Nepalese women migrant workers often endure poor living conditions and lack access to healthcare services. Occupational health hazards, including exposure to chemicals in domestic and caregiving roles, as well as the risks of physical and sexual abuse, are heightened due to their vulnerability and lack of legal protection.

The socio-economic challenges faced by Nepalese women in India hinder their personal development, restricting their capacity to save, invest, and achieve financial independence. The obligation to remit a significant portion of their income to support their families often limits their capacity to invest in skills or education that could enhance their economic mobility. While remittances from women migrant workers contribute significantly to household incomes and local economies in Nepal, their limited economic security means that this contribution remains unstable. Additionally, the absence of mothers and wives from family life has social consequences, as children and spouses face emotional and financial strains. This phenomenon disrupts family dynamics and sometimes exacerbates poverty cycles in the long term. Nepal's dependence on remittances for economic stability has significant implications for national development. However, the lack of protection for female migrants and the socio-economic challenges they face limit the potential benefits. Migrant women's contributions remain

undervalued, as the hardships they face in host countries, like India, reduce their capacity to build wealth and drive meaningful change back home. The socio-economic challenges faced by Nepalese women migrant workers in India are multifaceted, encompassing economic exploitation, gender-based violence, and lack of access to healthcare and social services.

Although migration enables women to support their families in Nepal, their incomes are usually meagre and insufficient for long-term security. Unlike male migrants to Gulf countries or Malaysia, who remit significant sums, women in India mostly spend their earnings on daily subsistence such as food, housing, and healthcare. As a result, their contributions remain undervalued in both family and policy discourses, despite being vital for household survival. Health challenges add another layer of vulnerability, with many migrant women suffering from occupational hazards, nutritional deficiencies, and limited access to healthcare facilities. Their lack of proper documents restricts entry into government health schemes, and reproductive healthcare in particular remains largely inaccessible. Emotional stress is also evident, as many women are separated from children and families in Nepal, leading to psychological strain and weakened kinship ties.

Documentation and legal exclusion further constrain women's lives. Although the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty grants free cross-border movement, the absence of proper identity papers or work-related registration means that women migrants are unable to claim welfare schemes, formal housing, or credit facilities. This lack of recognition keeps them outside labour rights frameworks and perpetuates their dependence on informal networks. Women who are single, widowed, or divorced face even greater exclusion, as they are stigmatized both in Nepal and India, with minimal institutional support to fall back on. Alongside legal exclusion, gender-based vulnerabilities emerge as a serious issue. Nepalese women migrants in India, including in Lakhimpur Kheri, are at heightened risk of sexual harassment, trafficking, and violence, especially in isolated workplaces such as domestic service. Patriarchal attitudes often discourage women from migrating independently, and those who do so are stigmatized, making it difficult for them to seek redress in cases of abuse. This creates a cycle of silence, where exploitation remains hidden and underreported.

Housing and mobility conditions also reflect broader marginalization. Women migrants frequently live in overcrowded, unsanitary accommodations, either in employer-provided quarters or informal settlements near construction sites. Their movements are restricted not only by economic limitations but also by fears of harassment and insecurity, which reinforces dependency on employers. These further ties them to exploitative labour relations, making escape from such conditions difficult. Social integration also remains a challenge, as women migrants often remain isolated due to language barriers, cultural differences, and their position as outsiders. Unlike male migrants, who may form broader networks, women are frequently confined to narrow circles of work and home. Their transnational identity positions them as economic contributors within their families in Nepal but as marginalized actors within Indian society, where their labour is undervalued and their presence often overlooked.

The role of policy and institutional structures is also significant in shaping these vulnerabilities. Despite high levels of cross-border mobility, Nepalese migrants in India remain largely invisible in formal migration policies, and women's concerns in particular are seldom

addressed. Existing labour laws in India provide little protection to informal workers, and bilateral agreements between Nepal and India rarely account for gender-specific needs such as childcare, wage parity, or protection from harassment. As a result, women migrants are compelled to rely on informal coping strategies, including kinship ties, community networks, and personal resilience, which are often insufficient in times of crisis, as seen during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

In sum, the findings suggest that Nepalese women migrant workers in Lakhimpur Kheri face deeply intersectional challenges shaped by the interplay of gender, class, migration status, and borderland location. Migration provides short-term economic relief but perpetuates dependency on insecure labour arrangements, while women's contributions remain undervalued both statistically and socially. Health vulnerabilities, housing insecurity, violence, and legal exclusion intensify their marginalization, and weak policy frameworks on both sides of the border fail to address their needs. From a sociological perspective, the lived realities of these women reflect structural inequalities that extend beyond individual hardship, revealing how migration in a borderland context reproduces broader patterns of gendered and economic exploitation. The specific context of Lakhimpur Kheri presents additional barriers due to its rural setting and lack of institutional support. Addressing these challenges requires targeted research and policy interventions that account for the unique vulnerabilities of this group. Future studies should adopt an intersectional approach and focus on local solutions to enhance the well-being of Nepalese women migrants. The challenges faced by Nepalese women migrant workers in Lakhimpur Kheri call for gender-sensitive and cross-border policy interventions. At the labour level, informal sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and construction must be brought under regulatory frameworks, with fair wage practices, workplace safety, and inclusion in minimum wage laws. Nepal should strengthen skill training and pre-migration awareness programs for women, while bilateral agreements between India and Nepal need to explicitly recognize women migrants as workers with equal rights. Access to healthcare is another urgent need; portable health cards and inclusion in public health facilities would enable women to receive affordable treatment, especially for reproductive and occupational health issues. Housing policies should prioritize safe, low-cost accommodations or hostels for migrant women, reducing their dependence on exploitative employers. Legal recognition through simplified cross-border identity systems would allow access to welfare schemes, banking, and remittances, fostering financial inclusion and security. Finally, measures against gender-based violence must be institutionalized through women's help desks, legal aid services, and awareness campaigns challenging the stigma around women's migration. A coordinated effort by governments, NGOs, and local institutions can transform migration from a source of exploitation into an opportunity for empowerment.

Conclusion -

The socio-economic challenges faced by Nepalese women migrant workers in India restrict their individual development and limit their contribution to Nepal's economic and social growth. Addressing these issues requires coordinated policies between Nepal and India, including the establishment of labour protections for undocumented migrant workers, access to affordable health care, and social support systems. The phenomenon of Nepali migration to

India, particularly in border districts such as Lakhimpur Kheri, is a complex socio-economic and cultural process that a single theoretical lens cannot explain. As this study highlights, Nepali migrant workers occupy a paradoxical position: they are essential to the functioning of local economies in India. The open border, historical ties, and shared cultural linkages between Nepal and India facilitate this movement, but the reality of settlement and livelihood in India exposes migrants to systemic inequalities. The theoretical perspectives reviewed provide multiple insights into their lived experiences. Classical and economic theories underscore the push-and-pull factors that encourage migration, while Marxist, dependency, and world-systems approaches reveal how structural inequalities perpetuate exploitation and limit upward mobility. Network and migration systems theories emphasize the role of social ties and institutionalized patterns of movement in sustaining migration across generations, while Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital help explain how socio-economic disadvantages are reproduced within migrant communities. Feminist and intersectional approaches shed light on the gendered vulnerabilities of Nepali women migrants, who often bear the dual burden of economic exploitation and patriarchal constraints. The frameworks of structural violence and social exclusion further highlight how migrant workers are systematically denied access to rights, recognition, and resources, making them an invisible yet indispensable workforce. Finally, transnational perspectives illustrate how Nepali migrants navigate dual identities and maintain enduring ties across borders, reflecting both resilience and marginality. In short, the socio-economic challenges faced by Nepali migrant workers in India are rooted in broader historical, structural, and cultural contexts. Their struggles are not only individual hardships but also reflections of systemic inequalities within the global and regional political economy. Understanding their experiences through a sociological lens enables us to recognize migration as more than mere labour mobility. It is a process deeply embedded in questions of identity, power, and social justice. Addressing these challenges requires not only policy interventions to ensure migrant rights and welfare but also a shift in the way societies value and integrate migrant contributions. Ultimately, the study of Nepali migrants in Lakhimpur Kheri reveals both the persistence of inequality and the resilience of human agency in navigating the constraints of migration.

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