



MARRIAGE-INDUCED MIGRATION AND CHANGING SOCIO-CULTURAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

Marriage-induced migration remains one of the most significant yet underexplored forms of internal migration in India, particularly affecting women. In the state of West Bengal, where patriarchal norms, kinship structures, and regional cultural practices strongly shape family systems, marriage often necessitates the relocation of women from their natal homes to their husbands' households. This transition not only alters their geographical location but also profoundly transforms their socio-cultural identity, agency, and status within both family and community.

The present study examines the dynamics of marriage-induced migration and its impact on the changing socio-cultural status of women in West Bengal. It explores how factors such as caste, class, education, rural–urban differences, and economic participation influence women's adaptation, autonomy, and decision-making power after migration.

KEYWORDS: women, socio-cultural, migration, marriage, participation

INTRODUCTION:

Marriage-induced migration is one of the most significant yet underexplored forms of internal migration in India. Unlike economic or educational migration, this form of movement is deeply embedded in socio-cultural traditions, particularly the patriarchal norm of patrilocal residence, where women relocate to their husband's household after marriage. In West Bengal, marriage-induced migration constitutes a substantial share of female migration, shaping women's social identity, family roles, and access to resources.

In West Bengal, marriage migration occurs across rural–rural, rural–urban, urban–urban, and increasingly inter-district and inter-state contexts. The state's diverse socio-cultural landscape—ranging from metropolitan areas like Kolkata to agrarian districts such as Malda district—presents varied experiences of women's adjustment, autonomy, and participation in decision-making after marriage. While marriage migration often reinforces traditional gender roles and dependency, it can

also create new opportunities for education, employment, exposure to urban lifestyles, and social mobility.

The changing socio-economic environment of West Bengal—marked by rising female literacy, expanding self-help groups, digital connectivity, and increasing workforce participation—has begun to reshape women's social and cultural status within marital households. However, the transformation remains uneven. Many women continue to face challenges such as limited property rights, restricted mobility, domestic responsibilities, and vulnerability to social isolation in unfamiliar environments. At the same time, younger generations of women are negotiating greater voice in family decisions, reproductive choices, and financial matters, indicating a gradual shift in traditional norms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Dey,M.(2019). About 300 million Indian women, or two-thirds of all Indian women, have moved for marriage, but this enormous movement goes mostly unnoticed. This essay evaluates the reasons for the bewilderingly large migration of Indian women and provides a detailed analysis. Marriage relocation does not increase the sharing of hazards, contrary to conventional wisdom. Furthermore, it is not motivated by skewed sex proportional traits. Instead, I offer a simple model in which guardians are required to search topographically for a spouse for their girl. The model explains the stark geographical differences by incorporating findings from geological inquiry.

Dey,S. and Dutta,R. (2013).This paper examines migrant workers from Bihar to Titagarh, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. It explores the patterns, trends, and gender differences among male and female migrants. Titagarh has long absorbed many migrants, functioning like a "sponge." The region was chosen due to significant migration from Andhra Pradesh and Bihar for jobs in paper and jute mills. Given the higher gender disparity among Bihari migrants, they were specifically included. The study focused on Wards 19, 20, and 21, where most Bihari migrants live. It considered three key factors to analyse the female migrant experience: health, workforce participation, and educational levels. For women who migrate from Bihar, their dual identity creates an "identity crisis. " The study concludes that, despite moving from rural Bihar to escape hunger and hardship, female migrants' gender identity remains vulnerable in an urban environment.

Bhowmik,U. (2024).Gender still has to be mainstreamed in conceptions of migration, and migrant subjectivities, experiences, and agency have not received the necessary focus in development studies discussions on migration. By summarizing the results of a study that investigated sociality among migrant domestic workers in Kolkata, this article aims to help close these gaps. It describes how women who moved to Kolkata from rural West Bengal lived out their migrant identities and the kinds of social interactions they had on a daily basis. By using identities derived from the 1947 Partition of India, they are able to assert their claims to the city through their socialities with their employers at the location of paid domestic employment. The essay highlights two important issues arising from these socialities: identity and self and relationship with the city. It does this by drawing on the concepts of "beings" from Amartya Sen's capability approach and the "right to the city," which was first put forth by Henri Lefebvre. It also demonstrates how these two frameworks are related to one another, which is made clear by the implications of the aforementioned socialities for the study's female participants.

Nandi,D. and Sarkar,S. (2020).In the western region of West Bengal, marginalized and landless people frequently use seasonal migration as a means of subsistence. Data from the Census and the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) have not included information on micro-level livelihoods and seasonal mobility. The current study focuses on the nature, traits, and contributing factors of seasonal migration and its significance as a livelihood strategy among micro-level women agricultural laborers (WALs) in Soul Ponamara Mouza of Hirbandh block. Purposive sampling, a semi-structured questionnaire, in-person interviews, and focus groups are used to gather primary data for the study. According to this study, WALs in the study area frequently migrate from Soul Ponamara to the nearby agriculturally thriving districts of Purba Bardhaman and Hooghly four to six times a year. The proportion of female migrants is nearly equal to that of male migrants. Women laborers are forced to leave the Soul Ponamara Mouza and its surrounding areas (Amjhuri, Bijardihi, Chaka Doba, Moshiara, Bamni, and Rangametia) in search of employment due to the small amount of agricultural land held, the monoculture system that is currently in place, the lack of irrigation facilities, and the lack of employment opportunities. On the other hand, these immigrants were drawn into the workforce by the high wages and enormous demand for trained and semi-skilled agricultural labourers during the sowing and harvesting season in the target area, which is the paddy and potato fields of Purba Bardhaman and Hooghly districts. The main livelihood strategy used by the rural WALs of this mouza to deal with the current poverty and food insecurity is seasonal migration, chosen for job and revenue production, according to the study's findings.

Heena,B. (2018) . We are paying more attention to gender-specific interstate migration as women is becoming more prevalent in all forms of migration. Women in India are increasingly moving from rural to urban areas in recent years. While business and work continue to be the main drivers of male migration, women's mobility has ultimately had an impact on poverty and health. Disease is spread by high population concentrations and contact rates, and health and educational services are sometimes insufficient.

Rohit,K. and Sarma,R. (2022): This research highlight the gender aspects of health as they relate to migration, displacement, and disasters. Tribal people, internally displaced women, and people living in crisis areas are all generally covered. Due to their susceptibility to violence and exploitation, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the risks associated with forced migration. Neonatal mortality is a serious issue. Women who are more susceptible to sexual assault are more likely to contract HIV, STDs, and a variety of other PTSD conditions linked to sexual violence. Even in well-organised refugee and migration contexts, reproductive health is frequently neglected and unprotected. Unnoticed is the health care system's insensitivity to these women's needs. Life-threatening illnesses are the result of this disregard for the health of mothers and children.

Saha et al. (2018) . Male out-migration from rural to urban areas has increased globally due to economic globalisation. Migration literature has traditionally focused on migrants' experiences at their destinations and their support for families left behind through remittances. Only recently has scholarly attention explicitly turned to the experiences of left-behind women. In this study, we review existing literature to examine this social process within a women's empowerment-disempowerment framework. Through a systematic review of the 'migration left-behind nexus' literature, we identify a clear trend of transformation in women's gender roles, particularly through the 'feminisation of agriculture'. This transformation is mainly influenced by the nature and amount of remittances received. The well-being and empowerment of women are shaped by the socio-cultural context in which migration occurs. The literature notes both positive and negative outcomes for left-behind women, although debates continue over whether migration is a conscious choice and its long-term societal permanence. We call for future research to explore migration-led women's empowerment more deeply within the broader context of social transformation.

Yeung, J. and Mu, Z. (2020). This article emphasises the contributions of the papers in this special issue while reviewing the research on marriage and migration. The studies demonstrate how the integration and assimilation experiences of Asian marriage migrants are intricate, multifaceted, and varied depending on their sociodemographic backgrounds, ethnic identities, and political environments.

The traditional assimilation hypothesis, which presupposes a unilinear integration trajectory in all pertinent dimensions, is challenged by the variations in the assimilation trajectories of Asian marriage migrants. By examining how various forms of migration influence family formation processes, such as divorce and remarriage, this subject diversifies the scholarly discourses on migration and marriage. It also looks at the factors that underlie the relationship between migration and marriage. Lastly, by revealing the intricacy of the relationships through quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method analyses, this special issue expands analytical repertoires in the field of marriage and migration. Variations in economic well-being, cultural assimilation, gender inequality in relation to marriages, the subjective well-being of migrants, and the impact of policies relevant to cross-cultural marriages are among the subjects covered in these studies. In contrast to western societies where racial/ethnic integration is a major concern, Asian migrants' family formation habits are heavily influenced by patriarchy, religion, caste, and the extended families of married migrants and their spouses.

Carlana,M. and Tabellini,M. (2025).Paper examined how immigration affected native marriage, fertility, and family formation in American communities between 1910 and 1930. Using a shift-share design, we discover that natives in cities with higher immigration rates were more likely to get married, start a family, and move out of the parental home sooner. According to our data, immigration raised the number of native "marriageable men" by increasing the employment of native men. We take into account other routes, including shifts in the native population's composition, sex ratios, cultural responses, and the economic rivalry that native women confront. We conclude that none of these can account for our findings on its own.

MARRIAGE-INDUCED MIGRATION AND CHANGING SOCIO-CULTURAL STATUS

Marriage-related migration is the main cause of female migration in West Bengal, with over 1.6 crore women settling in the state after marriage, mainly in rural areas, especially from Bihar, Jharkhand, and Bangladesh. This movement, influenced by patrilocal tradition, often places women in subordinate roles but also offers opportunities for socioeconomic mobility and shifts in household dynamics.

Marriage-Induced Migration in West Bengal

1. High Volume and Gender Skew

- According to 2011 Census data, marriage was the leading cause of migration in West Bengal, with nearly 1.65 crore people moving into the state for this reason. Of these, about 1.6 crore were women, while only about 3.4 lakh were men.
- This reveals a distinct gendered pattern: women are much more likely to migrate for marriage than men, a trend observed throughout India.

2. Rural Domination

- Most women who migrate for marriage settle in rural areas instead of cities like Kolkata.
- This impacts access to education and employment, which are more focused in urban areas.

Causes of Marriage Migration:

Social and Cultural Norms

- Patriarchal family structures in India often expect women to move to their husband's home after marriage.
- Marriage is regarded not only as a personal union but also as a social contract that connects families and communities, strengthening traditional roles.
- In many communities, the concept of a woman abandoning her natal family to join her husband's is strongly ingrained in cultural norms.

Demographic and Societal Factors

- Caste, class, and regional norms shape who marries whom and where women move.
- Educational attainment, social networks, and community pressures can all influence both the decision to migrate and the circumstances women face after migration.

Socio-Cultural Status of Women After Migration

Migration through marriage affects women's status differently depending on their educational level, economic resources, and social support.

This issue is discussed below.

1. Shifts in Roles and Responsibilities:

- Many women undergo a shift from their original family roles, shaped by parents and siblings, to roles dictated by in-laws and marital family expectations.
- This often raises domestic responsibilities and lowers decision-making power, especially in traditional households.

2. Access to Education and Work:

- Getting married at younger ages — sometimes even below the legal age — can limit educational opportunities for girls and young women, which can affect their long-term socio-economic mobility.
- Women migrating to rural areas may face obstacles to employment and mobility compared to those who remain in urban environments.

3. Negotiating Cultural Identity

- Migrant women need to adjust to new linguistic, cultural, and family norms. This can enhance their adaptability but might also pose difficulties in preserving their independence.
- Over time, younger generations might adopt more negotiated marital roles and use education and social networks to assert their agency.

Changing Trends and Emerging Patterns

1. Education and Delayed Marriage

- Studies in communities such as the Siliguri tribal belt demonstrate how literacy and education influence the age at marriage, showing that higher education can postpone marriage and reduce socially imposed restrictions.

2. Fertility and Family Decisions

- Recent ethnographic research from various districts of West Bengal shows that generational declines in fertility reflect changing attitudes toward family size and reproductive choices among married women.

3. Women's Agency

- A comparative study of pre-colonial Bengal demonstrates how social structures shaped women's agency in history and suggests that modernisation and social change have transformed women's roles and status over time.

Socio-Cultural Impacts of Marriage Migration

Positive Transformations

- Expanded social networks: Migrant women often build new community ties that extend beyond their natal locales.
- Exposure to diverse norms: Interacting with different social settings can expand perspectives, especially among younger women.

Persistent Challenges

- Patriarchal constraints: Residual gender hierarchies often dictate limited autonomy in decision-making within marital households.
- Economic dependence: Lack of job opportunities in rural or conservative regions can maintain women's financial dependency.
- Pressure for early marriage: Despite legal protections, early marriage still influences migration patterns and women's life choices.

CONCLUSION:

Marriage-induced migration in West Bengal is more than a demographic fact; it is a social process deeply rooted in historical norms and modern changes. While society gradually evolves—with increased education, delayed marriage, and greater agency—traditional patterns still influence women's lives. Migration for marriage can either challenge or reinforce women's socio-cultural positions, depending on context, economic opportunities, and changing family structures.

Migrant women frequently encounter initial challenges, including adaptation to new family structures, cultural practices, and social environments. These transitions can influence their autonomy, decision-making authority, and engagement in social and economic activities. Nevertheless, evidence indicates

that education, exposure to urban settings, and access to employment or social networks can progressively strengthen women's confidence, independence, and involvement in community life.

The evolving socio-economic context of West Bengal, characterized by higher levels of female education, greater awareness of rights, and the impact of modernization, is reshaping the experiences of women who migrate due to marriage. These women are increasingly involved in household decision-making, their children's education, and participation in local community activities, which contribute to gradual changes in traditional gender norms.

Marriage-induced migration in West Bengal constitutes a complex social process that both reflects and shapes women's socio-cultural status. Although challenges related to adaptation, dependency, and patriarchal norms remain, ongoing transformations in education, employment, and social awareness are gradually enabling women to exercise greater agency and redefine their roles within families and society. Consequently, policy initiatives and social support systems that advance women's education, economic participation, and social inclusion are essential to ensure that marriage-induced migration serves as a pathway to empowerment rather than a source of marginalization.

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