

Patriarchal Husbands at the Interface between Local and Global: Changing Gender Roles of Married Men and Women Due to Women's Migration to Middle Eastern Countries in a Peasant Colonization Scheme in Sri Lanka

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Abstract— In many patriarchal societies roles of married men and women are held in high esteems. However, in the context of increasing social and economic changes occurring at both local and global levels they cannot live up to the expectation of such societies. Married women are forced to take up breadwinner roles in many families, mainly due to poverty, unemployment, underemployment, low productivity and inadequate income in the agricultural sector along with the changing conceptualizations of individuals perceived wellbeing. Women's economic contribution has become critical to the survival and wellbeing of many families. At the same time, opportunities for women's economic participation are not always restricted to local spheres. It has expanded to global spheres too. In this perspective international migration is an important livelihood, option which mainly decided by global forces along with the local situation. In terms of international migration, Middle Eastern countries have been providing employment opportunities for men and women from their neighbouring countries for more than three decades. Dominated by female migrants, this livelihood option has gained much attention in terms of its social and economic impacts. Based on in depth interviews and focus group discussions, in three types of settlement in a peasant colonization scheme in Sri Lanka this article finds, that due to Middle East migration traditional gender roles of married men and women are undergoing considerable changes in these settlements. This article discusses why women migrate, how their husbands face the new role, how the changing gender roles are viewed by the society and the men whose wives have migrated. Focus group discussions conducted in the settlements identified a complex mix of views regarding the changing gender roles, with considerable difference in terms of age. In depth interviews revealed men are caught in multiple traps, where they could not claim whether they have achieved or empowered. They are confused and uncertain about their new gender roles.

Keywords— Gender roles, Men, Women, Migration, AMDP

I. INTRODUCTION

During the last three decades, development research has made Mahaweli women and their living conditions increasingly visible. Researchers have widely focused on the disadvantaged positions of women living in AMDP,

especially in terms of land title, gender, participation and health. However, a focus on men, especially about their changing gender roles due to the socio economic changes occurring at local and global levels has overlooked. Information gathered through focus group discussions and in depth interviews in the System H of the AMDP this research aimed at unravelling the changing gender roles of married men, whose wives have migrated to the Middle Eastern countries in order to alleviate their family poverty.

Research was conducted in three settlements in the System H of the AMDP in Sri Lanka. The primary objective of this article is to understand the changing gender roles of men, whose wives are working as housemaids in the Middle East. I try to understand how these changes are viewed by the society and men whose wives are away. In order to achieve this objective, I try to seek answers the following questions: Why married women in the settlements leave their homes to work as maids in the Middle Eastern countries; What impacts their migration have on the gender roles of their husbands; How the migrants' husbands view the new challenges they have to face due to the livelihood choices of their wives both within the family and society ; and the societal views on their husbands whom they leave behind to attend the household responsibilities.

The article begins with a brief theoretical discussion on how globalization has influenced local livelihoods and how migration has become a response. It also focuses on the gender dimension of this strategy. Next, section will concentrated on a short overview of Sri Lanka's entry in to the Middle Eastern Labour markets. This is followed by a brief discussion on the analytical frame work of the current study. I then explain the methodology adopted. In the next section, I introduce the research area briefly and the remaining sections are based on the analysis of the collected information and conclusion.

In her study conducted in Mahaweli area during the period 1978-1982 on "Women and rural development in the

Mahaweli area” Lund (1993) explains how female settlers in the settlement are subordinated and exploited in three ways: first, in terms of social status where women became subordinate to men as they became dependent of their husbands who were considered as the head of the households by the planners; Next, it is related to the Mahaweli work allocation system, where women had to do tasks previously allocated to men in agricultural activities, which were also called as “men’s work” along with the “women’s work” at home. Both these works were unremunerated or under paid (Bandarage 1998). Lund (1993) notes that during this time men did very few “women’s work”; the third is related to the loss of women’s inheritance right in the new settlement scheme, which put women in a marginal position. She also notes women’s mobility was very much limited in the settlements both within and outside the settlements, which limited women’s social interaction. Her study’s findings are important and contribute significantly to the major discussion of this as a reference point to the past situation in terms of men’s as well as women’s gender roles in the settlements.

The time she conducted research in Mahaweli area, household tasks like, drawing water, collecting firewood and cooking were considered as “women’s work” and men were prevented from engaging in household works. At the same time women in Mahaweli did “men’s work too”. Although the above situation was observed by Lund during the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Mahaweli settlements, the present situation of women as well as men in terms of their productive and reproductive roles have considerably changed. Among many other factors, changing livelihoods of Mahaweli settlers have significant impacts on men’s and women’s traditionally held gender roles.

Although unmarried women and men too migrate, the reason why I selected married women and men in understanding the impacts of Middle East migration on their gender role is because, in Sri Lankan society, like in many other Asian countries, marriage is an important institution where gender roles of men and women most of the time become more complicated, complex and challenged. Further, when I selected informants for in depth interviews, I focused on the informants who do not obtain the support of the extended family ties or receive minimal assistance from such links. In generally when women migrate to the Middle Eastern countries for work they exploit the extended families to look after the children and attend the household chores. Men’s gender roles cannot be clearly understood in such contexts.

A, AMDP and Economic Liberalization

AMDP which is the largest, multi purpose colonization project in the country was initiated during the late 1960s and accelerated during 1977-1981 in order to solve, many pressing social problems of the country. Among them solutions to the problem of unemployment needed high priority which was the main cause of social unrest all over the country. Slogan of the new government came to power at that time was

“Employment first, employment second and employment third”. Parallel to the acceleration of the Mahaweli development project, the new government embarked on other structural adjustment programmes too. Through the opening up of economy to foreign markets, ample employment opportunities were opened up in two dominant areas, in the country namely garment industry and Middle East migration. New employment opportunities fuelled by liberalization and globalization mainly absorbed women in to newly created employment opportunities both within and out side the country. In order to alleviate poverty and fulfil their various aspirations, many women all over the country, made use of these employment opportunities. However, not all women could benefit from the opportunities opened. Access to these two main streams of employment depended on several factors where age and marital status became the most influential deciding factors among others. Access to garment industry for married and aged women was much limited. For them, Middle East migration provided the alternativeⁱ.

Although many poor women all over the island joined and benefited from these two types of employment, Mahaweli women’s entry in to the above two streams of employment was relatively late. Specifically, their entry in to Middle East migration was much late. During this time, while many women outside the settlements were engaged in waged labour and contributed to their family well being, Mahaweli women contributed to their family well being through unremunerated works at home and in their family land. They were not attracted by employment opportunities created out side the settlements. The reason behind this decision can be related to the initial adjustment period in the settlement, where they did not have time or access to think of any other opportunities. It can also be related to the short lived initial successful periods of the project benefits. When such benefits started to slip the hands of the settlers, they became helpless and desperate. Farmers who heavily depended on paddy cultivation were seriously affected by debts, market failures and crop failures along with the declining profit margin for paddy (Sudder 2005). As expected income generation from agricultural activities declined far behind the expectation many of them started to give out their paddy land on share (*ande*)ⁱⁱ or leasing out methods. Siriwardane (1981) has observed this trend in the system H as early as in the 1980s. By the late 1980s with increasing poverty many settlers either sold their land or / and worked for the elites in the settlements (Schrijvers 1988). By early 1990s under the second round of structural adjustment reforms, withdrawal of fertilizer subsidies and the subsequent rise in the cost of production (Jayaweera 2002), made the situation worse for the Mahaweli cultivators who comprise two thirds of all cultivators. Many of the settlers, who were by that time small land holder, and weaker segment of the population in terms of capital, could not reap the benefits from expanding regional economies or wider markets. As the market oriented growth strategy failed to trickle down, many Mahaweli settlers, gradually started to change their livelihood choices.

Finding their livelihoods outside the settlement was not without constraints. It clearly had gender and age dimensions. Young women were able to find employment opportunities in the garment industry. Young men find employment in the security forces. Employment opportunities were comparatively limited in these sectors respectively for middle aged married women and middle aged men. Faced with poverty and few opportunities for paid work in the settlements and outside the settlement such women in the settlements have resorted Middle Eastern countries to break the vicious cycle of poverty. The most vulnerable group in terms of employment options were middle aged men who did not have any other option than sending their wives to the Middle East and South East countries. This study focuses on such men.

During the last decade, a gradual positive change has been observed in the settlements by the settlers in terms of economic well being. During the reconnaissance study, settlers, especially the older people told me that the income they earned by cultivating paddy or other crops and vegetables are gradually replaced by remittances. Although they are happy to see their settlements have, TV, radios, motorbikes, cement floored houses and houses with roof tiles they are very much worried about "some men in the settlements are becoming women". This is how they referred the changing gender roles in the settlements.

B. Theoretical Framework: Livelihoods in the wake of globalization

Livelihood perspective has gained increasing attention among development Geographers in the analysis of poverty (Haan & Zoomers 2003) and different ways people response to changes (Haan & Zoomers 2005). According to Ellis (2000, 10) "A livelihood comprises the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household". In his definition of livelihood Ellis emphasizes the importance of different types of assets, activities and access to these, which are essential for the survival or well being of individuals or households. While providing an overview of historical and theoretical context in which the modern livelihood approach is built upon, Haan & Zoomers (2003) identify an important trend in the livelihood studies, where they highlights the scale of analysis. They identify how livelihood studies have gone beyond the levels of households, families and local communities to the levels of extra-local, and meso or macro contexts. This is particularly true in the era of globalization where people's livelihood choices have transcended the boundaries between various sectors of the economies and often the boundaries between traditionally discrete geographical spaces (urban-rural, local-global).

Today, the various livelihoods practiced by people are increasingly linked to the contemporary process of globalization and local changes. Livelihoods of many rural people are increasingly becoming diverse (Ellis 2000; Rigg

2006) and gradually moving from land based activities and hooked up with labour markets located at different places around the world. People exploit opportunities located at different places and such opportunities today are largely determined by and depended on global forces (Haan & Zoomers 2003).

Migration as livelihood choice is also an opportunity decided by global forces, and globalization has created a highly mobile labour than ever before. Migration has been identified as an important type of livelihood diversification (Ellis 2000). Migration as a livelihood choice in response to overcome poverty and respond to risks or any other unexpected circumstances which may threaten the survival of individuals or families is not a new option for many rural poor. Ellis (2000,72) identifies seasonality, risk, market failures, erosion of assets, landlessness and disasters which results in the collapse of livelihoods as push factors of migration. Poor people around the world are compelled to diversify their livelihoods in order to make their daily ends meet and/ or to live a life they prefer. According to Ellis (2000,15) "Rural livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living". It is important to note here that people diversify their livelihoods not only to survive but also to increase their standard of living. Thus, when discussing livelihood diversification Ellis (2000) identifies, necessity and choice are important reasons, individuals or households pursue diversification as a strategy. At the same time he also admits, trends and processes in the larger economies also motivate people to diversify their livelihoods in order to respond to such trends and processes. In many poor societies reasons for diversification is more directly related to necessity than choice. In rural areas around the world, due to increasing population, land fragmentation, lack of or no access to land along with changing macro and micro socio-economic and political environments people are compelled to diversify their livelihoods and in the absence of a local system that could provide employment, people naturally decide to move in search of employment.

During the last three decades globalization has provided different avenues for many people, especially for women in terms of livelihood options. It has provided employment opportunities for many women in their own countries as well as in foreign countries. In terms of such employment opportunities, while one line of studies have documented how women in developing countries have become direct or indirect victims of globalization, other studies have documented how women's autonomy and empowerment has increased due to their economic participation both within and outside the country as a result. Although exploited at global markets, more and more women are becoming part of it and empowered at local level as their roles and responsibilities have changed, than their male counter parts.

In the academic literature, focus on the gendered impacts of globalization has provoked greatest discussions on women's empowerment, relative autonomy and their status. However, it should be acknowledged that the increase in women's relative economic power gained through economic participation is gradually shattering men's gender roles as they are stepping down from their breadwinner roles. In patriarchal societies, globalization, especially through the feminization of labour markets has challenged the traditionally held gender roles. At present men in such societies are not in a position to fulfil their traditionally expected breadwinner roles. At the same time men are compelled not to prevent women from taking part in paid labour.

Although men in such societies do accept the fact that their gender roles are undergoing tremendous changes, they are not openly accepting that they have become inferior, disempowered and humiliated. It is also pertinent to note that, though some men do not feel women's economic participation have a negative impact on them being their husbands, they are socially marginalized due to the existing gender ideologies in the contexts in which they live. Many of their lives have become double edged swords, where they cannot refuse the migration decision of their women and accept the new role created consequently.

C. Analytical Framework

Gender is an important aspect in understanding migration as a livelihood strategy. In terms of migration as a livelihood strategy gender dimension are important with significant migration of women. Until a decade back migration as a livelihood strategy was mainly pursued by men (de Haan 2000). However, due to greater demand for female labour force in certain types of employment in service and industrial sectors, migration has become highly feminized. Further, who migrates, why they migrate, what have they achieved, adjust and who they leave behind are very important in terms of the impact that migration as a livelihood strategy is going to have. Standing (1989) points out that increasing demand for female labour force not only have resulted in feminization, but also a decrease and transformation in men's employment. It has not only changed men's employment but also their gendered roles in many societies. Chant & Gutmann (2000, 42) discussing on the importance of involving men in Gender And Development (GAD) notes that 'women and female identities affect men and social norms of masculinity'. As more and more women enter in to paid employment traditionally held notions of gender roles are also changing in many societies, including in the patriarchal societies. In patriarchal societies while men's work is associated with productive work, women's work is related to reproductive works. Due to the increase in women's entry in to paid employment, men and women's participation, contribution in terms of gender roles at household and society are also changing. These changes can be studied through a gender analytical framework.

Wickramasinghe (2000, 36) identifies gender analysis as 'consideration of ways in which men and women participate differently in the household, economy and society'. A gender analytical frame work in this study is related to how men's and women's gender roles are changing due to women's Middle East migration. Households, economy and the society are important reference points here. Because, economy influences the livelihood choices of people. House hold and the society are domains where men and women have to practice their gender roles and negotiate or re-negotiate their gender roles.

D. Methodology

I collected data through three focus group discussions with the settlers and six personal interviews with the husbands of the migrant women. The focus group discussions and in depth interviews were conducted from March 2005 to June 2005. I carried out my research in three different types of settlements namely: re-settlers (Solama); evacuee settlers (Maliyadevapura) and settlers from the other parts of the country (Kongwewa). I conducted three focus group discussions in each settlement which lasted around 2-2.5 hours. When selected people for the group discussion, I considered their age and sex mainly. Each group consisted of five to seven participants. Recruitment of the participants was done through snow ball method. The group was very dynamic. Cameron (2000) notes that active focus group discussions are much useful for researchers conducting studies on socially constructed nature of knowledge. Pratt (2002,215) points out that 'Focus group methodology is premised on the notion that we develop knowledge in the context and relation to others'. Gender being a socially defined, culturally different, changing concept, I found focus group discussions provided very different and interesting facts about topic introduced for the discussion.

I conducted six separate individual in depth interviews with the husbands of the Middle East migrant women. I choose to conduct in depth interviews with such men, is to make them easy with the environment in which they could provide information on their changing gender roles. Speaking about a topic like this in a focus group would definitely put them in an uncomfortable situation. Focus groups are not a place if I want their 'voices to be heard'. Dunn (2000) says when the interviewer and informants are at ease with each other informants become more communicative. He further notes, when discussing the strengths of interviews, he identifies, and interview is an important method to collect data on experiences and opinions. He also claims that interviews are useful in seeking out the opinions of rarely heard voices. In this research, interviews provided many interesting information on the way men see their changing gender roles.

When I selected the men, I focussed on men who managed household duties and child care without the support of their relatives or with minimal support from their relatives. Reason for this stratification is because; men's gender role cannot be

fully understood in a situation where they get the support from other family members. Further, in the settlements studied, extended family types, which have existed for a long time is gradually giving way to nuclear families, which is going to be the future scenario in the settlements. This is not to say the mutual helps the family members received from each other has completely stopped. However, focus group discussions revealed that such helps are declining due to women's increasing engagement in economic activities.

When I approached these men, they were initially reluctant to talk about their experiences. They said they do not have time and many other excuses. Although I knew that they could allocate a couple of hours for me, they did not want to talk about the topic. However, my constant presence in the settlements and the small size of the settlements (where they could not avoid seeing me in one of the houses, the village shop or at least on the road) made them impossible to avoid me. But, I never wanted to break the research ethics by forcing them to be my informants. However, a middle aged man whose wife has recently arrived from the Middle East helped me to break the ice. Therefore, I managed to do two in depths interviews in each settlement I studied. I had an informal discussion with each of the informants and introduced my topic. However, being a female researcher, from a totally different social environment, interviewing such men was not without a challenge for me. I was seen by them as an 'insider' only because I also represent the same nationality and could speak their language. Except, these two criteria, I was a 'total outsider' for them in many ways. Eventually I understood that, I being an outsider made my informants much comfortable than talking to an insider. When one of the man told me "As you are an outsider (*pita ekkenekhinda*) I can tell you this...". Similar attitudes of other informants provided me a wealth of information on what I wanted to find out.

E. Findings

Middle East Migration

As a result of globalization and trade liberalization, in Sri Lanka, more jobs were created for women than men. In the globalized labour markets, Free Trade Zones and Middle East migration are the two main important employment fields where women's concentration is very high. Although, employment opportunities in these two sectors have made some positive effects on women's life there negative effects cannot be undermined. In the case of Sri Lanka, although it entered the Middle East labour export market relatively late (Eelens. & Speckmann 1990) it has now become one of the main female unskilled labour export countries to the Middle East (Weerakoon 2000). In Sri Lanka, Migrating to Middle Eastern countries and some prosperous South East Asian countries is dominated by women, a growing phenomenon which has its roots in the process of economic globalization and liberalization of the country's economy in the 1977 (SLBFE 2005). Sri Lankan women's participation in the

globalised labour market has both positive and negative impacts (Gamburd 2003). While many of these migrant women were subjected to various forms of exploitation (Bandarage 1998; Jayaweera 2002) they still continue to work in the Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries. Many poor women in the country migrate under conditions of severe socio economic pressures. Many of them or their partners or other family members could not find employment opportunities in their villages. Most of them could not access the formal labour market due to their personal incapacities in terms of education and skills, age or gender. The available survival strategy is through daily work which is lowly paid and unreliable.

F. What does the society expect

Following section reflects the views of the participants of focus group discussions in the settlements. Their views were centered on, why women migrate, how do they view migration and how do they view the changing gender roles created by this particular livelihood strategy. A man reflected:

"I used to see a carving knife on Sumane's wife shoulder. Now it is replaced by a hand bag. All because of Arab money. They have a good life. But, I feel sorry for Sumane. He had to do all the household works, send children to school when his wife was abroad. His wife came from Lebanon last week. He still continues to do all the household works. Women can go around the world. But she should not forget at home, her place is kitchen"

(A man aged 50 from Solama focus group)

While this statement demonstrates a humiliation of a village women's transformation, it also demonstrates that although women's roles are changing and they are contributing to the well being of the family, expectation of the society in terms of assigned gender roles has not changed. A Similar attitude was revealed by older women in the group.

"Even if they go to moon, women are women. They should know how to cook and take care of the family. Men should bring the money. Women's duty is to manage that. In our time no women went to foreign countries or to the town to work. I know some women sold vegetables in the *pola*ⁱⁱⁱ. But, before they leave they do all the household works and they return on the same day to take care of the household works."

(A woman aged 63 from Solama focus group discussion)

Throughout the focus group discussion this old woman actively contributed to the discussions and argued for traditional gender roles. However, even within patriarchal, societies, there may be different voices:

"Many young women in the village are working in the garment factories or in the Middle East as there are no jobs in the village, even for men. I have heard

earlier *chena* and paddy cultivation provided everything people needed in the village. Now we are living in a totally different world. We have to adapt to that. You know there are lot of women in the Sri Lankan army. But not all get the chance to serve the country. Women who go to Middle East at least to serve their own families. So what if their men take care of the works done by their wives, at least when they are absent.”

(A young woman aged 24, from Solama focus group discussion)

A middle aged man expressed negative views on Middle East migrants in the village and blamed such women for bringing modernity to the village and taking control over the family.

“This is a village. Here people have certain ways of behaviour. If some one is behaving differently, people will gossip. Many women who go to Arab countries, not only bring money, but also modernity to the village and they deteriorate out culture. We do not respect them. When such women return home they do not respect their husbands. Wife takes the control of the family as she earns. It should not be the way. Now their men cannot speak against them other than washing the pots. They are not shame about this. During our time my mother will not sit in front of my father.”

(A man 40 from Solama focus group)

Although many young women and men in other focus groups had a more liberal view on at least women’s economic participation out side, if not on their changing gender roles, this young man had a more negative view on women’s economic participation and the men who are depending on wife’s remittances. He could not accept women taking over the power in the family.

“I feel really shame of men who are sending their wives to Arab countries. Men should be men. If they cannot provide for the family, why should they marry or have children? How can they allow women to work out side? Isn’t it disrespect for men to eat on wives earning? I am not against working women. I know women who work in this village. Many of them are having a good family life. They are good mothers and good wives. They cannot be equated with women who go to work in the Middle East. Women going to Middle East expect their men also to be modern. Such women have full control of their husbands. Men are loosing their male powers”

(A soldier aged 23 from Solama focus group)

Following is the view expressed by a middle aged man. He had a more balanced view on men and women sharing household responsibilities. He also had a positive view on the

choices of the migrant women as they could improve their living conditions.

“In our village, many married women have gone to the Arab countries recently. Many of them managed to build a good house. What to do? With the jobs available for men in this area, one cannot even imagine to build a wall. So, unlike in the past husbands and wives have to share their household responsibilities. So why can’t men do household work in the absence of their wives.”

(A man aged 36 from Kongwewa focus group)

Young women’s attitudes over women’s Middle East migration and changing gender roles of men and women always supported the choice of women.

“Our men go to kitchen only when their wife or other family members are sick. But they cannot remain like that any more. If they can send their wives to Arab countries why can’t they take care of the household works and the children? They should be really thankful to their wives as their wives are doing what they are supposed to do”

(A young woman aged 22 from Kongwewa focus group)

This young man also held the same view.

“I think it is OK for women to go abroad and save their families. I don’t understand why the society is looking down upon the husbands of such women. They are doing the so called ‘women’s works’ in their own home. They are taking care of the children too. Isn’t it their responsibility?”

(A young man aged 26 from Kongwewa focus group)

Following view is expressed by a man who very active in the discussion. He often pointed out the problem of finding employment in the settlements and out side the settlements. He himself had been unemployed and underemployed at several occasions. He also had a big family to feed. But none of them are qualified to migrate due to their age and two of her daughters physical disability.

“It doesn’t matter from where the money comes from until it is legal. This is not a time to debate about women should be in the kitchen and men should be in the “bazaar^{iv}”. Until you feel hunger your self you won’t argue whether men doing women’s work is right or wrong”

(A man aged 54 from Kongwewa focus group)

This young man justified his argument for women’s livelihood choice which changed the men’s gender roles in the settlement by pointing out the broken promises of the project. He also emphasized the importance of being active.

“Our parents were told that they would have a good life in Mahaweli, through agriculture. But many of us

could not have the promised life. But can we remain until fortune knocks our doors? We have to find our own ways and the women here who could not find employment have migrated to Middle East. While many of their families are doing well few could not. It is mainly because of their men. In the families where men who managed their wives money and took care of the family and other works are living a good life now. So what is wrong with the women's choice to go abroad and men's choice to take care of the family?"

(A young man aged 24 from Maliyadewapura focus group)

This old man emphasized the importance of maintaining the generally recognized and accepted rights and privileges of men which has been long established in the settlements. He stressed women and men have defined and different spheres.

"No argument over this issue. Men should do men's work and women should do women's work, where ever they go. Our women know what women's work is and what men's work is"

(A 64 years old man from Maliyadevapura , focus group)

In the following section, I present the stories of men who are multiply trapped. I asked them about what influenced the migration decision of their wives, how they managed and accept the new gender roles and how they view the society's reaction.

G. Isn't it time to listen to their voices too.

The following stories are based on the in depth interviews conducted with men who have sent their wives to the Middle East.

"I am working in our family land. My father did not divide the land yet. So everything is shared. My wife is not satisfied with the income I am getting from my work in our paddy field. She used to complain about the future of the children if I continue to work in the family land. So she decided to go. She is now in Lebanon. Until she left, I did not know how to cook, though I knew some simple cooking. Initially my who is living closer to me helped me with cooking and taking care of the children. She passed away last month. Now I have to do everything alone. I leave my children with my brother's family only if there is a need to go out side the village. I have three children. All of them are schooling. I cannot ask my children to do the house hold works. They are too young and they have lot of school works. I know that I am not doing my work well like my wife did. But I cannot do more than this.....In the society people are jealous if a family is on the path of progress. I am not much bothered about people's comment. However, I do some times feel I cannot be a free man in the society. I feel like I am not treated well "

(Informant aged 35 years, from Solama)

Though his wife is in abroad, he is also working in his family paddy land, taking care of children and doing other house hold duties. He decided to send his wife as a maid in order to build a house.

"At first I was little worried about my wife's decision....but I thought in our village men who work in the government sector also have send their wives as housemaid, so what if I... . I have three daughters and two sons. With my income I could not afford a good life for our family. Our family was very poor and some times we could not eat three time a day. My elder daughter wanted to stop her education and join a garment factory. Then my wife told she will go abroad and save the family. Now I have almost built my house. We can buy other things necessary for the house later. After my wife left, I am not doing any job. I have five children, how can I do a job and taking care of them. I am carefully spending the money my wife sends. In our village some of our old men have not even gone to the nearby town. You just think in a society like this how female migration will be viewed....They often tease me at the village shop, but I just ignore them. I do not participate in many social events where some people gossip about working women"

(Informant aged 49 from Solama).

He has send his wife abroad mainly because of his poverty and to prevent his daughter from abandoning her education. He reflects a success story. He had managed the money his wife has sent. He is taking care of the children well and the household duties too.

"I am working in a rice mill and earning a small income. This is not enough for our development. I send my wife abroad to solve many problems our family faced. I cannot solve them alone. I have to repay a loan that I lost due to a self employment effort. It is difficult to manage household works along with taking care of three boys. Some times I get angry. But then, I forget everything thinking of the difficulties my wife is undergoing. She got a very tough boss. She says if she starts to work in the kitchen from morning, she does not know until it was mid night. She tolerates everything for us. So why can't I?..... I am not worried about the comments of the society. Those who criticise men like us do not feed our family. If I cannot feed my family, they will criticise me for letting my children to starve. I have sent my wife abroad now. They criticise that decision too. If I give some chewing gums and perfumes I can shut their mouths.

(Informant aged 42 from Kongwewa)

This man has send his wife abroad to solve many of his family problems among which he emphasis a loan he has to repay. He is tolerating all hardships like his wife does abroad. Everything is for the betterment of the family. He is not worried about the comments and criticisms of the society.

“I am a heart patient. I could not do any hard work. I worked as naattami, before I had the heart problem. This is the reason why I had to send my wife abroad. I have two school going daughters who are eight and ten. I am not expecting my daughters to help me in the household work. I ask them to study well. Although I am not familiar with household works I do my best. My wife told me, she will be in abroad for another two years, thus around the time elder daughter will attain age. This is a time where daughters need lot of care and attention from mothers. I am carefully spending the money she sends. I have applied for a loan also. I think if we can buy a tractor and rent it out, that will be enough for our family’s survival.....When men cook in hotels and their wives cook at home, people do not think men are doing women’s job. But when men cook at home and their wives cook at Arab people’s kitchens, then people say men are doing women’s job. I don’t know why they can’t understand this. I am not stealing others property, I am not cheating others. I have sent my wife to make our future better. I don’t know why that bothers other people.

(Informant aged 39 years from Kongwewa)

He decided to send his wife abroad due to his illness. When he could work he had worked hard. Now he is depending on his wife. He is also managing household works. His daughters are performing well at school. They have helped him to keep his home and garden neatly. He expects his wife would stop her journey in search of employment after she earns enough to buy a tractor. He too is not worried about the comments of the society.

“My wife wanted to go to Kuwait to build a house for us. I worked as a coolie worker. I knew I could not even dream of building a house. I managed to put up this house with a lottery ticket I won. How can I expect I will win another in the future? After my wife left, I did not do any coolie works. I have five school going children. Three of them are girls and I cannot leave them alone. It is due to my poverty I gave the permission to my wife to go out. Now we have almost completed the house. I asked my wife to stop going again and buy a three wheeler to me. So I can earn something. But she is not listening to me. If I write a letter asking her to come home, she will stop sending the money. She did that once. Now I am not asking her to come or buy a three wheeler for me. My responsibility is to bring up children. I don’t earn

money. So my word doesn’t worth. So I have to tolerate everything my wife does”

(Informant aged 37 from Maliyadevapura)

I was surprised by this man’s story. When I first met that man at home with his children, I thought that he represents a success story of Middle East remittances. In terms of material well being he has been a successful husband who did not waste or destroy his wife’s remittance. But in terms of non-material well being, I cannot label him as a successful man. He feels passive, helpless and inferior.

A particularly inspiring story came from an army deserter. He shares his new gender role:

“I am an army deserter. I decided to send my wife as I could not find any other jobs in the settlement since I left the army. People do not like to give coolie work or any other work for an army deserter in our society. Further, I had to live under cover for some times. My family is very poor. That is why my wife took the decision to go to Kuwait. Our son is three years old. So I am spending the whole day with him. It is really difficult. He has become very stubborn after my wife left.....Regarding the society’s views, it is really difficult for a man like me to face the society as I have send my wife abroad. It is because my previous job in the army. During that time I had a good respect in the village. Now I have to face two challenges. One as an army deserter, the other as a husband depending on wife’s income even to cut my hair. Some times, I really hate my life and the society. But what to else could I do? I have a son. He should have a good future”

(Informant aged 29 from Maliyadevapura)

Army deserters in Sri Lankan society do not have good social recognition as many of them were found to be involved in criminal cases after leaving the army. Therefore, they cannot easily access employment opportunities if their backgrounds were known. This man also find difficult to find an employment in the village or outside the village due to his present position. As he did not have any other option, he sends his wife to work as a maid in a foreign country. He is mentally worried about his dependence on his wife.

II.CONCLUSIONS

After incorporated to Mahaweli project many men, who were earlier, unemployed or landless got a new social role as bread winners or land owners. During the initial years of resettlement, men benefited from, land title, access to credits, training facilities regarding cultivation, wage labour, technology and cash income, at present these advantages are slowly slipping off their hands. With the socio economic changes occurring at local and global levels gendered constructs of men are gradually changing in the settlements. Although many women have gain access to areas once they

were denied, it is hard to say that women are fully empowered or happy about their achievements. Although women in the settlements were left out in the initial planning of Mahaweli in terms of access to land, many women have actively responded to the changing situation now unlike in the past. They have challenged the patriarchal gender roles of a peasant society by their decision to be economically active.

In many societies the traditionally assigned gender roles are being challenged due to local and global forces. Even patriarchal societies like that of Mahaweli settlements gender roles have considerably changed. Although these changes are obvious and inevitable in Sri Lanka, how society views such changes need lot of attention as such views are mixed. According to Perera (1997) gender roles in a Sinhalese society is associated with morality and honour. Although the roles of married women as wives and mothers are held in high respect (Bandarage 1998), they cannot fulfil their obligation as wives and mothers due to socio economic pressures. Due to similar reasons, married men too cannot fulfil their role of providers.

I wanted to find out how this is viewed in terms of different settlement backgrounds and age categories. In terms of settlement backgrounds, changes in the gender roles of men and women created by Middle East migration have received considerable attention and mixed reaction. Some focus groups participants expressed a doubled standard. While they acknowledge, women should work in order to help the family, they also emphasised, household duties should be attended by women. Settlement background did not have any significant influence on the way settlers view the impacts. It is also pertinent to note that Mahaweli settlements have considerably lost their Mahaweli identities after almost thirty years since their formation.

In terms of age category views of changing gender roles created by Middle East migration of married women had a clear difference. Women especially young in all settlement had a more liberal view where they emphasised, the importance of family well being rather than changing gender roles. Young men also supported this view. Despite the changes occurring at local and global levels in terms of social and economic realms, many of the elderly villager's expectation of the gender roles of married men and women remain unchanged. Although many of the focus group participants in all settlements agreed that they and their future generation should have a good life both at present and future and find alternative ways to achieve that objective some of them did not accept that this should happen at the expense of men's changing gender roles. The elderly people could not accept any development in the village should deteriorate men's position in the society. Elderly and middle aged participants were much concerned about, men's caregiver role rather than women's bread winner role

Some elderly participants in the focus group also raised the issue of women's raising economic power which is unacceptable in the settlement context. One man in the

Solama focus group expressed: "In our village women are given their own places, but they cannot expect that they should have equal places like men, if they expect they should go further, they will loose what they are enjoying now". This statement re-emphasises the traditionally held up views on gender roles indirectly. Settlers, have certain established though unwritten expectations of gender roles of married men and women. When men and women could not live up to that expectation of the society, they are not getting a proper place in the society.

In all focus group, women's increasing economic power and men's declining economic power were gained much attention. Even, among the participants who did not view women's economic participation and consequently changing men's gender roles as a negative effect, women's long term absence or continuous migration was not viewed as a positive trend. According to some of them, in the long run the above trend may force men to loose their power and force them to become depended on their wives for every thing. One man in Maliyadevapura focus group expressed "I don't blame, the married women for going to Middle East. Most of them have decided to go such a long way, in order to bring a good life for their families. They use their money to build or repair the house; buy a piece of land or a three wheeler or a tractor. Even after fulfilling, some basic or necessary means for survival, some women continue to go. I don't know why they can't settle with their families in the village. When Middle East journey of a wife continues, men become more and more powerless". Some of the women have use migration as a simple survival strategy. In this case their journey never comes to an end. Though some migrants have successfully used migration as a livelihood strategy to overcome poverty or to improve their situations, many could not do so. Although remittances could contribute to reduce poverty, this can only be achieved if the remittances are used or invested in productive resources, which can sustain income. The successful use of the remittances depends on the hands of remittance receiver, where in the study remittance receivers are migrants' husbands. In many cases under this study, remittances were not used successfully. It is simply because, of three reasons. First, poverty is the main reason which pushed the women to take migration decision. Many of them did not have any other means to meet the day's ends. Therefore remittances were mainly used to daily consumption needs, pay the interests or repay the loans which they have taken to cover the cost involved in the migration process. In such cases husband's revealed that the money their wives send is hardly enough to meet the monthly expenses of the family. The second reason is, many men who send their wives abroad do not go to work. They become lazy and depend on wives' income. The third reason is related to the conceptualizations of 'poverty' and 'good life' by the migrants. Men's and women's sense of well being a different, especially when women migrate, their conceptualization of well being are much influenced by the place of their work. This is an interesting fact to note. Migrants' views of poverty

have considerably changed since their migration. This was revealed by a man in Solama focus group “Some women who migrate forget their past. Before migration they think, their families will be able to eat three times if they migrate. But after they go there, they think their families should be able to eat chicken three times. Note this. Such women never want to come to the village ” The conceptualization of a ‘good life’ differs among men and women, especially in a context where women had the exposure of luxury Arab life. This also makes the Middle East journey continuous.

In the settlement studied all the above discussed reasons have created Middle East migration as a cycle. Thoez (2005) terms such situations as ‘migration dependency cycle’. She explains how unemployment creates poverty which results in migration and remittances invested in non-productive consumption again creates the need for migration. This situation was especially observed in migrant families where, husbands did not do any type of employment since their wives left or in families where husbands were addicted to alcohol and gambling.

Poverty and its related other dimensions along with lack or no employment for men (mainly) and women in the settlements or outside the settlements were identified as the main reason, why men in these settlements have decided to send their wives abroad. Lack of employment or insufficient incomes have prevented men from fulfilling their expected roles as men, husbands and fathers. They could not satisfy the needs of wife, children or any other immediate family member.

Further, in the settlements conceptualization of poverty and a good life is undergoing tremendous changes. This also has implications on women’s Middle East migration and consequently changing gender roles of both men and women. Some women have migrated to build a good house, accumulate dowries for their daughters, invest on their children’s education and invest in a productive asset. Unlike in the past, people today are much future oriented and planning their present accordingly. Such attitudinal changes also have impact on what people do or choose as their livelihoods.

As married women in these settlements have chosen Middle East migration as their livelihood, which needs a long absence from their homes, men are compelled to take care of the household responsibilities from cooking to child bearing. For some informants this new gender role is really a challenge. But, they don’t have any other option than accepting and adjusting. Men who are engaged in paid work and taking care of the household works revealed that they are living a life which is full of pressure.

These men also have to face the challenges of the society. Although many of them admitted that they are not worried about the comments or criticisms made by the society on their new role, they cannot ignore such comments totally being part of the same society. Because, it is in the same

society, prior to their wife’s employment they benefited from the patriarchal structures though which they enjoyed a considerable freedom. Now many of them are caught in a paradoxical, frustrating situation which they neither avoid nor accept. Because their social values are degrading, self esteem is declining, their masculinities are criticized and eventually they have become passive, disempowered and helpless although they are reluctant to speak about these experiences. In families where married women continue to migration as a livelihood choice, men are gradually withdrawing from their financial obligation towards the family. In such families, conflicts over gender roles, responsibilities and decision making has intensified and men have become depended, powerless and voiceless.

The study also revealed, while migration as a livelihood choice generally improved the conditions of families, either men or women in such families in these settlements could not openly accept whether they have achieved or empowered as a result. This is also related to the fact, in Sri Lankan society although remittance contribute to considerable share in the foreign exchange earning^v, (Bandarage 1998) the social images of migrants have always been negative (Gamburd 2000). Although women individually enjoy greater freedom than before to some extent, their husbands do not feel the same. This also shows how poverty erodes the social status of man. Although in Sri Lankan societies women were confined to both productive and reproductive roles for a long time, society’s expectation emphasises much on her reproductive role. In rural societies like that of the settlements under study, although a considerable change has occurred in terms of gender roles, patriarchal values are still maintained and appreciated. Consequently the problem is not about women’s migration, but about their socially determined gender roles.

The study revealed, although this strategy has brought economic advantages, it could not bring social advantages to the same extent. During the process of socio economic changes occurring in the settlements while married women are responding with greater flexibility to the opportunities provided by globalization, men are being increasingly disempowered although it is unnotices, as their voices are unheard.

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(SLBFE) 1997, percentage of female migrants of the age group 26-40 was 68.3 among the total female migrants.

ⁱⁱ Under 'ande' system of cultivation the total production of the harvest is shared between the two partners.

ⁱⁱⁱ A type of rural market

^{iv} Although the direct meaning of this term is 'street' literally it means the public domain.

^v Sorensen et al (2002) notes that migration and development policies often ignore migrant's gendered identities and practices. In the case of Sri Lanka, gendered impacts of Middle East migration should gain more attention including men in the gender analysis.

ⁱ In the rural society generally women marry before the age of twenty five (which is now slowly increasing due to women's education and economic participation. According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment