



LIFE WORLD OF EMIGRANTS' WIVES IN THE SANGRUR DISTRICT OF PUNJAB

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Abstract

The life world refers to every day, intersubjective experiences that individuals take for granted within their social environment. Against the background of the Sangrur district of Punjab, the life world of wives of emigrants provides an insight into how women negotiate their personal, cultural, and emotional realities at a time when husbands migrate and are away for several years. This sociological study is, in an indirect sense, connected with these life worlds as it will delve into the lives of these women while blending traditional expectations with modern aspirations and, in the process, coping with the emotional and practical complexities of migration.

Keywords: life world, expectations, coping mechanisms, self-image, marital roles.

Introduction

In Sangrur district where high migration to Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom is reported to be taking place, the wives undergo a phenomenal shift in life worlds. Life without husbands is characterized by daily activity that encompasses taking charge of issues previously relegated to the sphere of men, including charge of agricultural activities, management of household finances, and community affairs. This involves material involvements like raising the children's education as well as maintaining contact with the family members of origin. It does most times frustrate their identities but at the same time, it introduces a new set of skills and independence as in a family, both spouses will play the roles of carer and decision-maker without proper training.

Emotional labour is at the core of these women's experiences. As migration drives husbands and wives physically apart, the women maintain family life separately while encouraging emotional relationships between borders. Technologies such as WhatsApp, video calls, and social media enable them to keep those relationships afloat, actuating bridges among distant family members. However, the emotional labour of managing long-distance relationships is significant. This not only generates loneliness and uncertainty but also places a buffering role on these women, through emotional labour, in protecting the psychological reality of their children from their father's absence.

The "social contemporaries" concept, proposed by Schütz (1993), makes clear the role that community networks assume within the lives of these women. In Sangrur, when husbands are away, good neighbourhood ties extended family relationships, and women's organizations in the locality offer much-needed emotional support as well as material help. Social networks acquire vital importance for dealing with crises, taking care of children, and household chores, while these women find themselves moving through increasingly changing lifeworld's. These interactions give emotions of belonging together and facilitate a feeling of belonging, therefore, allowing them to adapt to new responsibilities. The participation of women in social networks is evidence to show how community influences their lifeworld and sustains social cohesion during the separation phase.

Another dimension to view the experiences of emigrants' wives in Sangrur is the concept of migratory trajectories as discussed by De Miguel-Luken et al. (2009). Even though, in general, the experience of emigration is often synthesized under the male mobility prism, it is these wives who are going through parallel trajectories characterized by social and emotional transitions. Their migrant journeys are neither geographically, nor strictly speaking, about movement but also problematic personal and social texts that unfolds with time. These women are catapulted into the trenches of very different life roles within their families and communities, as they make arduous decisions affecting children's welfare and the household's viability. These individual trajectories thus form the poles of challenge and opportunity in migration because women have to juggle family obligations and personal ambitions.

For Pries (2010), transnationalism is therefore much more complicated and complex to the lifeworld of these women. For Sangrur, the reach of migrations worldwide is such that these women, while locals become shaped as much by locals as by transnationals. Regular telecommunication with their husbands abroad ties up with foreign cultures and practices in the lives of these women, subtly shaping their lifestyles and aspirations. The children of such families are also accustomed to global education trends and career ambitions, transforming the family dynamics further. At the same time, these migrant children continue their traditional Punjabi customs, such as attending religious festivals and social get-to-gatherings. The entire situation creates a hybrid cultural identity; this reflects how migration orients and reorganizes personal and social realities.

Reflective of the lived experiences of emigrants' wives in the Sangrur District, this study promises to attain a nuanced understanding of the impacts on human conditions in international migration. The stories pointed out how interrelating local traditions and global influences affected intricate aspects of emotional labour involved in cohabiting long-distance relationships and the crucial role that social networks play in family stability. Their life world shares with us the complexity of the act of migration, such that it would justly weigh the economic results against the personal and cultural dimensions. Of consequence to the comprehension of the experience of migration are these experiences: their lived realities throw light on the importance attributed to personal growth, community engagement, and cultural adaptation in shaping the migration experience.

Defining "life world" in the context of emigrants' wives

Alfred Schütz coined the term "lifeworld" to describe "the intersubjective space within which people live," which are "their social worlds and the shared knowledge which contextualize and organize life." In the case of a wife whose husband is an emigrant, "the life-world reflects the specific challenges and accommodations she has to make in the context of her husband's absence." Those experiences are so matted in the depths of cultural expectations, familial responsibilities, and the emotional labor it takes to run a household and raise children alone. Their lifeworld is so intricately entwined between tradition and modernity, both very disparate roles that negotiate their agency with all the changes that have happened in this society. It is highly applicable in areas like Punjab's Sangrur District, which is one region where cultural background intensely fills family life patterns and gender role enactment (Talbot and Thandi, 2004).

Understanding the life-world of emigrants' wives goes beyond the mere analysis of economic and social consequences; there is a much deeper insight into their personal and emotional dimensions. Indeed, women in this context are usually balancing traditional expectations with newfound independence, taking on male roles while fostering a sense of community and support among them. The emotional topography of their life experiences, defined by resilience, adaptation, and often lonely isolation, moulds their identities and aspirations. Moreover, these personal narratives reveal and articulate broader migratory trajectories that represent how globalization and international ties impact their daily lives and relationships. A probe into their life-worlds would serve to better appreciate the multidimensional reality of wives of emigrants in Sangrur and strength, complexities, and lived experience in the context of migration.

Autonomy and Personal Growth

Autonomy and self-actualization are essentially very important components of the lives of the wives of emigrants in the Sangrur district of Punjab. These women often acquire new skills through education as well as vocational training and thus acquire leadership positions within their households. While playing out their duties, many of them redefine their personal goals and move beyond the traditionally aspired goals to seek greater freedom and self-fulfillment. This travel journey allows them to be self-sufficient and strong as they

take opportunities that come with the challenges of staying away from their spouses for an extended period. In the end, their experiences reflect a transformational process by which autonomy becomes a pathway to personal empowerment and new identities.

Development of New Skills

In Sangrur, the migration of men for overseas employment has led to considerable social and economic challenges for the wives left behind. Women like Sukhdeep Kaur (anonymous name), 32, have had to take on additional responsibilities, from managing finances to overseeing their children's education. While remittances from her husband, who worked in the Middle East, have allowed Sukhdeep to invest in her children's education and healthcare, the psychological toll has been significant. Despite improvements in their academic performance and better healthcare access, the emotional and social strain of bearing the weight of both roles—financial supporter and primary caregiver—has led to feelings of isolation and stress. The remittances have certainly improved the family's quality of life in material terms, allowing for home renovations, but the absence of her husband has created long-term emotional consequences, leaving Sukhdeep with unresolved emotional needs and a sense of loneliness.

Women in Sangrur have engaged in vocational training, such as sewing, tailoring, and handicrafts, in an attempt to contribute financially while working from home. However, the reality is that despite these skills, the women face challenges in becoming self-sufficient. The financial contribution often remains minimal and insufficient to cover the rising costs of living. Furthermore, the emotional and mental exhaustion of balancing household duties with earning income has taken a toll on their well-being. Women involved in household improvements like cooking and gardening find these tasks to be exhausting and lack the support systems needed for true personal growth. This sense of independence, while empowering on the surface, often masks deeper issues of financial insecurity and emotional distress. Despite their efforts to balance multiple roles, these women remain under immense pressure and struggle to find stability, revealing that the material benefits of remittances are often overshadowed by the emotional and psychological challenges of managing a family in the absence of their husbands.

Participation in Decision-Making

Male out-migration for better economic opportunities overseas has transformed the economic and social settings in Sangrur District, Punjab, and significantly affected the lives of women left behind. Sukhwinder Kaur's (anonymous name) story exemplifies these women - a 33-year-old married woman, whose husband works in the Canada. Sukhwinder reports an increase in respect and equality within her family as she has taken on senior roles in the absence of her husband: managing finances, health care, and her children's education—fieldwork typically managed by men. She found this change empowering. Respect and equality have grown in her household. In fighting for her children's education, she has participated in communication with teachers as well as contacting local representatives to improve educational instruments. This involvement benefits her family while strengthening her social ties with other mothers and community members who share her goals. However, this empowerment comes at such great cost and struggles, especially in the face of the stories of Hanpreet Kaur, Jasmeet Kaur, Manpreet Kaur, Navdeep Kaur, and Amandeep Kaur (all names are anonymous). Each of these women, just like Sukhdeep, experiences tension and loneliness as they seem to live lives isolated from their families. Harpreet suffers such extreme loneliness that is coupled with the burden of huge responsibilities since her husband has left for more than a year now. Kulvinder is doubly burdened with having to take responsibility for raising children to school and doing other household work, which brings undue stress and physical weariness. Kulvinder has the simultaneous problem of young children and aged parents, where chronic stress and health problems are issues for him. Gurpreet faces social stigma as a "migrant's wife", which brings her down in her estimation and increases her loneliness. Constant tension over her husband's safety and the responsibility to take care of the family alone starts creating severe anxiety and physical ailments in Gurpreet. Such cases give evidence of the more complex reality for many women in Punjab, where male migration brings about economic power but brings a lot of emotional turmoil, isolation, and physical health challenges along with it.

Redefining Personal Goals

The wives of emigrants in Sangrur have changed most of their personal goals and aspirations before this changed scenario of migration. Traditionally, they were confined to 'domestic roles and caregivers, but with the changed scenario, the reality of greater prospects opens through contacts beyond the traditional borders. The exposure to global cultures through their husbands' experiences abroad has inspired many to seek a broader understanding of their potential and aspirations. Some have personal objectives that are linked to obtaining higher education, career, or community engagement. Such includes attaining higher education or opening a business area that suggests an increase in the desire to be independent and engage in social activities. The transformation is also ensured by local NGOs and community programs that spur women into entrepreneurship as it will make them feel valued and empowered.

The changing dynamics of gender roles in Sangrur have empowered many wives of emigrants to redefine success on their terms. No longer just defined by their roles as wives and mothers, these women are increasingly asserting their individuality and developing personal goals and talents. For example, Sukhdeep Kaur, 32, while managing household finances and investing in her children's education, also found herself embracing new roles that contributed to her personal growth. Similarly, Greysi Sachdeva, whose husband's remittances supported her pursuit of education and entrepreneurship, has redefined success by opening her own tailoring business. This shift in self-perception increases their self-esteem and inspires the next generation, particularly daughters who witness their mothers' journey to autonomy and self-fulfilment.

These women's lives are articulations of a shift in the balance between autonomy and personal development in the face of adversity. Women like Jasmeet Kaur, 34 years old, and Manpreet Kaur, 35 years old, have faced emotional challenges but also reformed their roles by being involved in decision-making and acquisition of new skills. These women are breaking free from gender stereotypes while building up their families at the same time. It is these strengths of resilience and adaptability that will be carried on by the next generations to create their futures. In negotiating these complexities, they embody the possibilities of independence and self-actualization and pave the way for future generations to achieve more independence and opportunity.

Identity Transformation and Self-Perception

Identity transformation and self-perception form the primary impetus to the lives of wives of emigrants of the Sangrur District of Punjab. Gradually, such women are crossed over from being wives to eventually becoming self-dependent personalities of high integrity as their identities transform almost profoundly. Much of this happens in the reinterpretation of marital roles to reconcile psychologically with the sense of emotional independence. Thus, with growing financial independence and shifts in social views, it is their self-concept that grows more positive in the sense that it starts to reflect a developing confidence and mastery of their own lives. Finally, in this process, an increased consciousness of self-development, which can permit them to accept new identities in new settings.

Navigating Identity Shifts

The impact of migration in the Sangrur district of Punjab in particular is not only new economics but also a much more significant change in the identities of emigrants' wives. They mostly go through deep identity changes while husbands work abroad to provide work opportunities. In reality, this means so much in terms of psychological and social transformations from just being a wife and doing housework as a wife alone to becoming an individual capable of living independently. Many women, who were once identified essentially through their marital roles, now assume responsibilities that require them to engage with their communities and seek economic independence.

In Sangrur district, the absence of emigrant husbands has forced women to redefine their self-concept and relate to roles that have much more agency and initiative. For example, this change can be seen in women like Baltej and Amandeep Kaur who have undertaken things that were way beyond mere expectations. They now manage the finances of the house, select their children's educational routes, and even participate in community work. It is the autonomy that now empowers them to build an identity that would not define them simply by their marital lives. Thus, balancing societal pressures and personal aspirations, they move on a journey of growth and empowerment that shapes their identity. Baltej and Amandeep Kaur have even become entrepreneurial by tailoring and Tiffen service at home only. It is said to represent a huge self-conceptual

change in her life. However, the journey toward independence and economic input in this process is a transformation of identity that calls for strength and malleability within the women themselves.

Reinterpretation of Marital Roles

The departure of husbands to work abroad forces wives in Sangrur, Punjab, to redefine their marital roles, leading to significant psychological changes related to emotional freedom. In traditional Punjabi society, marital ties are highly valued, with husbands typically seen as the primary decision-makers and breadwinners. However, the physical absence of husbands due to emigration compels women to take on tasks that were previously seen as their husbands' responsibility, leading to a shift in the dynamics of marital partnerships (Nanda and Veron, 2020).

This psychological shift in the direction of emotional freedom is very deep. These women, like Amandeep Kaur and Baltej, often look back and realize that their strengths and abilities extended far beyond their role as a wife. Harpreet, for instance, shared the financial burdens of managing the home, thereby drawing autonomy and self-esteem that would otherwise have been restrained by the narrow gender roles. Women like Sukhdeep Kaur and Baltej feel a sort of new freedom in life as they manage it independently with emotional liberty to make decisions without having to check on their husbands every time. Such a change in their emotional independence greatly enhances their confidence and helps them build greater personal power.

Empowerment, however, is never without a fight. Women like Jasmeet Kaur and Manpreet Kaur are lonely and emotionally drained as they try to incorporate family needs with their needs. Like Jaswinder, who feels lonely as she constantly battles the emotional burden of being left behind while her husband is away, and barely spends time at home taking care of the family on her own. Whereas some of them gain maturity in relation, others feel deprived because, in their absence, the husbands will not attend to their needs, which frustrates and disorients them. Even as there exists varied attitudes towards roles, this ambivalence suggests that whatever the long separation brings up emotionally might relax marital dynamics and individual well-being, at least superficially. On balance, though, most women tend to approach marriage without much ambivalence, in that the old hierarchical structure gives way to the relationship of communication and sharing of tasks, which does improve the total welfare of the family on hand, even if they are apart physically.

Changing Self-Image

As wives who emigrate to Sangrur take on the newfound independence, thus recomposing marital roles and identity, these changes in self-image take effect. Financial management is instrumental in these changes as women who depended on husbands for decision-making on money matters now take on all challenges as regards managing the household finances and making purchase decisions. This sense of economic power makes them feel proud of themselves as they feel that their economic input is yielding measurable outputs (Cooray, 2017). Women in Sangrur claim that they are proud of the fact that they generate incomes for their households besides running business undertakings. Financial control transforms their self-concept; they consider themselves earning members of their household rather than merely carers. As they gain financial security, they feel more confident which enhances the self-sense of value beyond the normal gender spectrum.

CONCLUSION

Socio-cultural expectations embedded in the Punjabi society further shape the lifeworld's of these women. In rural communities, there is a strong cultural norm among women to uphold traditional gender roles: they must concentrate on managing their households and maintaining family honour. However, migration shifts around these conventions. Women emigrants at Sangrur face the issue of being caught between traditionalism and modernity because though they can take public roles, they continue to remain anchored to cultural expectations. Most women apply their new political position in self-help local groups or community organizations, making a fusion of the old with a new role. Therefore, the lifeworld's in many cases are a complex interplay between maintaining cultural continuity as well as adopting the changes

Furthermore, societal perception is another determinant of this change. In the case of Sangrur, the society generally identifies and values the efforts of the women members who take an active role in the economic mainstream. Of course, through such visibility in markets and community activities, the identity of these women changes from being solely restricted to being "wives" to being recognized as "providers" and "leaders." Such a transformation leads to societal perception change confirming their self-worth while also urging other

women to tread on similar paths, thereby giving the sphere of influencing the community a ripple effect. With these changes, most of them have the boost to feel proud and liberated to be independent and self-confident. They become role models for their daughters and other women in society, indicating what might happen if one gets out of the traditional gender roles. This new identity increases their perceptions of belonging and empowerment as women more and more express themselves beyond just their marital positions.

The experiences of emigrant women of the district Sangrur in Punjab support this view and represent complications arising from identity transformation and self-view in light of emigration. Women who experience identity changes, re-evaluation of marriage roles, and integration of evolving perceptions of self-personality better represent resilience and flexibility upon witnessing changes in social thinking. In brief, these journeys reflect a deep redefinition of identity that goes far beyond what used to be thought within the confines of traditional practices. Such experiences, in the end, open a whole new chapter of exploration and empowerment for these women. If new roles, new responsibilities, or maybe new decisions create the capability to enhance families' ways of life through improved productivity, these women's efforts not only aid in supporting their families and communities but also change stories about female identity in Punjab for coming generations.

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