

## GENDERED LABOUR MIGRATION AND CHANGING GENDER ROLES IN *MOCHA* GN DIVISION, MASKELIYA: BACK TO SQUARE ONE?

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In the tea plantation estates of Sri Lanka, labor migration outside the country, particularly among women, has become increasingly prevalent due to economic necessity and social change. Women from the tea plantations have long been engaged in internal labor migration. However, during the past two decades, women's labor migration to Middle Eastern countries has become a rising trend challenging the patriarchal social fabric of the tea plantation estates. Migration has triggered significant shifts in household dynamics, reshaping gender roles and family responsibilities. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes qualitative and quantitative data collected from surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and *Mocha* GN division's statistical handbook and labor migration records. This study explored the transformative impact of labor migration on gender roles in the *Mocha* GN division of Maskeliya, focusing on how migration alters traditional gender roles and unfolds new challenges and opportunities. The study employed the conceptual frameworks of productive and reproductive roles to understand the changes. The findings revealed a predominant trend of female migration in the estate, which has altered traditional gender roles. While women work abroad and send remittances, men in these households are compelled to take on roles typically associated with women, such as cooking, childcare, and household management. This shift has increased men's involvement in domestic responsibilities, temporarily challenging the established gender norms within their community. At the same time, migrant women, who become the primary breadwinners through remittances, experience enhanced autonomy, financial independence, and stronger household decision-making roles. Despite these temporary shifts toward more equitable gender roles, narratives of returnee migrants showed these changes are often temporary. Upon return, with time, female migrants resume their traditional roles and men revert to financial providers. This finding highlights unsustainable gender role transformations in migrant-sending communities, where economic necessity prompts temporary change, but cultural norms continue to dictate everyday life. The research highlights the need for policy interventions to reduce gender bias and support sustainable gender equality through social and economic empowerment programs for returnee women.

**Keywords:** Labor Migration, gender roles, gender equality, Mocha GN Division, household responsibilities