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*Women face difficulties going to Gulf where job opportunities beckon
Legally open, closed in practice*

Bijaya Babu Khatri

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Why do men alone fear of being called impotent?

Sujata Aryal

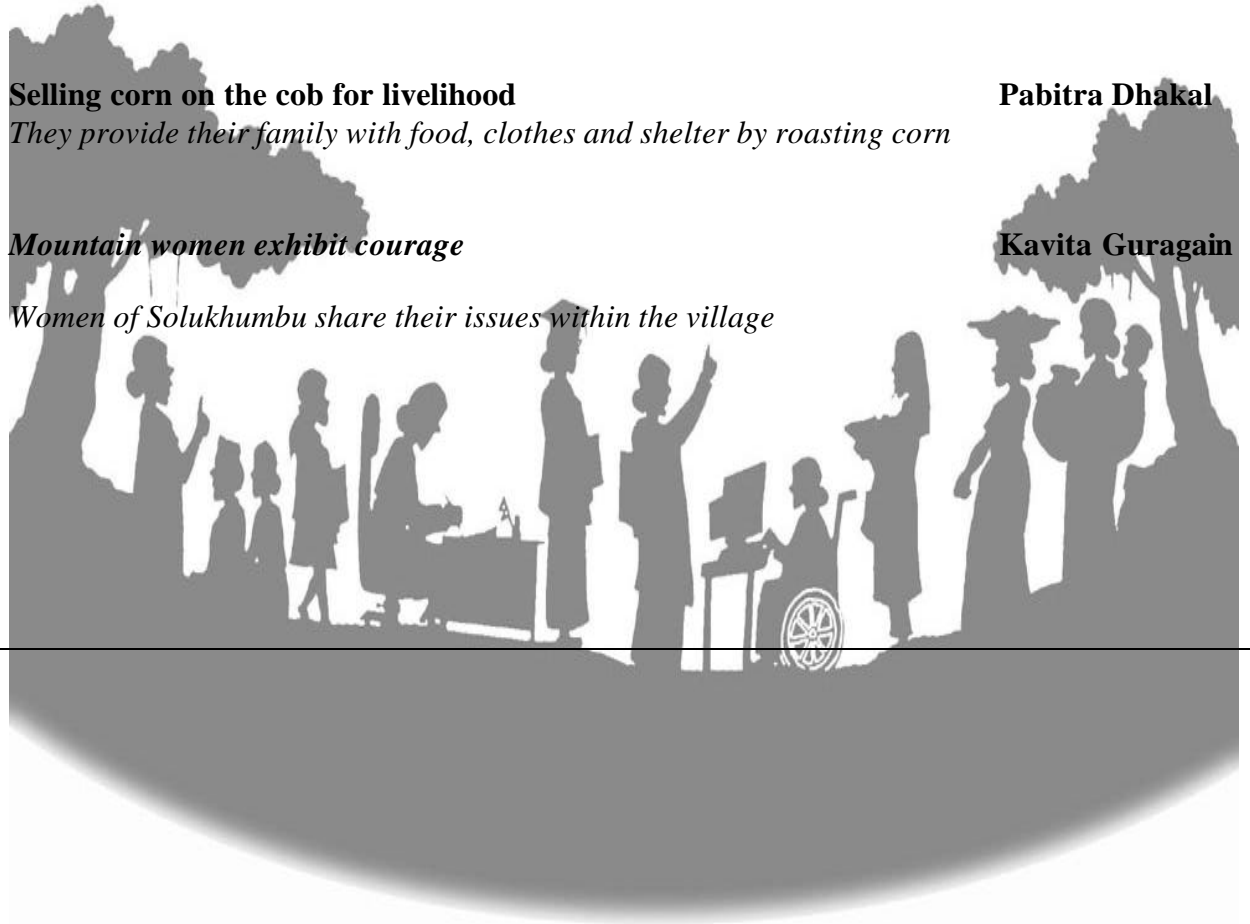
Selling corn on the cob for livelihood
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Women face difficulties going to Gulf where job opportunities beckon

➤ By Bijaya Babu Khatri

With just an ordinary work experience in a beauty parlor in Kathmandu, Maya Limbu is earning about Rs 100,000 per month in Dubai from the same work. Likewise, Kamana Basnet, who worked as a receptionist in Biratnagar, now earns 70,000 rupees in Qatar. Although the Gulf region offers plenty of opportunities for women, Nepalese women cannot make it there easily. The official procedure is full of hassles, forcing them to take the Indian route to go to Gulf countries.

With just an ordinary work experience in a beauty parlor in Kathmandu, Maya Limbu is currently doing the same job in Dubai. Her husband called her there after he started to earn 50,000 rupees a month. Now her income is three times more than that of her husband and both have a happy life.

Likewise, Kamana Basnet, who worked as a receptionist in Biratnagar, came to Qatar four years ago. Her current job involves showing customers the new products of a multinational watch manufacturer in City Center, a major business hub, and giving them perfumes as a gift. That fetches her 70,000 rupees per month, a comfortable flat and a car. She is educating her siblings in Kathmandu.

Someone who got just 5,000 rupees a month teaching at a boarding school in Kalimati for half a decade, Sonalika Dangol presently teaches at a British school in Doha. Her salary is over Rs

100,000 and her children are studying in Ajmer, India.

These are just some examples of women who are engaged in convenient jobs in the Gulf and earning handsome salaries. Of late, many Nepalese women are working in the Gulf. They are employed in supermarkets, departmental stores, hotels, travel agencies, factories, hospitals, petrol pumps, restaurants, cyber cafes, shops and computer institutes and so on.

The number of women who go to the Gulf with government's permission, however, is

negligible. The number of women who went to Qatar and the UAE with the permission of the Department of Labor and Employment Promotion in the last two years is barely 100 each. Those who have gone to Saudi Arabia with official permission can be counted on one's fingers. Although the number of women who have gone to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE through official channels is less than 100 each,

women account for 30-40 percent of the participants of Nepalese cultural and sports competitions there.

Experts attribute the discrepancy between actual numbers and official data to the fact that the number of women going abroad through illegal channels far exceeds that of those taking the legal route. There are 10,000 Nepalese women each in Qatar and UAE and over 20,000 of them in Saudi Arabia, say Nepalese organizations there. A few months ago, Saudi Arabia had informed in a letter that over 40,000 women were working there.

With the permission of the Department of Labor and Employment Promotion, 900 women went abroad in the fiscal year 2003/04 and 893 in 2004/05. But according to informal data of Nepal Rastra Bank and money transfer companies, women contribute 15 per cent of remittances.

On the one hand is the negative attitude of government officials towards women seeking foreign employment while, on the other, women have to go through hassle-ridden procedures that men are exempt from. This has forced women to go abroad via India. The Indian route is all the easier for women because of the open border and the presence of embassies of Gulf countries there. There are plenty of

employment opportunities for women in the Gulf.

According to Badri Prasad Pandey, chairman of the National Coordination Committee of the Non-Resident Nepalese Association (NRNA), there are plenty of jobs for women in Doha as lots of multinational companies are rapidly setting up manufacturing and service industries. The honesty and perseverance of Nepalese youth impress employers, and each year about 5,000 additional women get jobs.

According to C P Sapkota, advisor to the International Coordinating Council of NRNA and who has been working as a human resources counselor to multinational companies in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, which is on its way to becoming a major regional trade center, also offers plenty of opportunities to women.

Sapkota says that as the next five years will see the opening of more than 100 hotels and hundreds of travel agencies and departmental stores, along with the development of Palm Areas, each year more than 5,000 Nepalese women who can speak English and have some technical knowledge can get attractive jobs.

Nepalese women working in ordinary posts in the Gulf region earn salaries up

to 20,000. Those working as security guards in banks, hotels and big multinational companies also get attractive salaries. Women enjoy a conducive working environment in the Gulf region. “Those who tease or discourage women are severely punished here. The management has even sacked employees who teased [women] over cell phones, and has thus created a good working environment for women,” says Pandey.

“The majority of Nepalese women have come via India to avoid bureaucratic hassles in their country, and most of them have got good opportunities as well. But as they come through illegal channels, it is difficult to rescue them when they are in trouble,” says Nepalese Ambassador to Qatar Shyamanand Suman. He points out the need for sending Nepalese women to the Gulf region legally as they can get attractive jobs. He says it is not proper for the government to create hurdles to formally sending women to work in an organized sector.

Following continuous news reports about women workers facing hardships in the Gulf region a few years ago, a cabinet decision in May 1997 (Jestha 3, 2054 B.S.) banned women from going to the Gulf to work as housemaids. But for the public at large, the impact of a news five years later on the lifting of the ban (Magh 3, 2059 B.S.) was as much as the imposition of the ban.

According to Dhruba Kumar Sharma, spokesperson for the Ministry of Labor and Transportation Management, meetings were held repeatedly between

representatives of the Finance, Home, Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Women, Children and Social Welfare, General Administration, and Foreign Ministries, Nepal Rashtra Bank, National Women’s Commission, Police Headquarters, and Foreign Employment Entrepreneurs’ Association. Circulars were also issued to the agencies concerned.

The main reason for the negligible number of women going abroad taking the permission of the Department of Labor is the state’s weak policy and discouragement, argues Saru Joshi, chief of the programme related to empowering women seeking foreign employment under UNIFEM.

She says that although the government has allowed women to seek foreign employment in the formal sector, it has not had a big impact. When Saudi Arabia sent a letter sometime ago, pointing at the need for taking policy and practical decisions in connection with sending women there, she went there for discussion.

After her visit, Joshi notes that it is not enough for the government to only lift the ban on women seeking employment in the Gulf. “Until the government is able to simplify the procedures and inform all its agencies about it, women will be forced to go to the Gulf via India,” she adds.

Joshi says the policy of banning those Nepalese already in the Gulf is not realistic at all. This shortsighted policy of the government has resulted in women reeling under unemployment,

and are deprived of plenty of golden opportunities abroad.

According to women who have returned home after working abroad, they did not suffer any misbehavior there. Rather, Nepal and even the village where they were born and brought up have become unsafe for them. In foreign countries, the society is liberal and the social environment is completely safe. Liberal societies have equally stringent security measures in place. Women's security is accorded far more importance abroad than in Nepal.

“A government that imposes ban in the name of women's security in foreign countries should also pay attention to the development of women within the country,” says Joshi. As over 90 per cent of the population of Arab nations are Muslims, they have adequate measures for the protection of women in the organized sector. Sexual harassment in workplace is out of question while the environment of Gulf countries like Dubai and Qatar is at the level of Europe's and America's.

Courtesy By
Sancharika Samuha

Is infertility found only among women?

“Thinking of happy days ahead, I willingly married a man chosen by my parents. But the husband blamed me for being childless, and threw me out of the house,” says Saraswati Mahat of Dakshinkal in Kathmandu. “The doctor said in private that I could not conceive because my husband had some defects. But in society I had to endure the blame and the pain.”

➤ *By Sujata Aryal*

“Thinking of happy days ahead, I married a man chosen by my parents without any hesitation. How did I feel when the husband blamed me for being childless, and threw me out of the house?” asks Saraswati Mahat of Dakshinkali, Kathmandu. She had felt that she was the saddest person in this world. It is said that God takes care of those who practice self-dignity and fidelity. Saraswati is now the mother of a son and a daughter. “I never thought that I would be able to taste worldly

happiness again,” Saraswati says. After all, she had no physical defects that could make reproduction impossible.

Problems can make people wiser. Saraswati, who was born in a village and who is barely literate, did not complain to her parents because she believed that her parents had meant good for her. Despite allegations from her family members, she did not speak a word against them. She thinks that her second marriage is not a mistake.

“If I had stayed back, thinking that I had reproductive defects, I would have suffered more. I could have remained childless forever,” says Saraswati.

Getting married to an army man of her parents’ choice, Saraswati thought she was the most fortunate one. Love from all, the husband’s government job, some fixed property—for illiterate Saraswati, it was the pinnacle of women’s happiness. Over the years, she could not receive the same love from her husband and in-laws. The reason: She was not able to give birth

to a child even after five years of marriage. Her

husband is equally responsible for the pain Sarawasti had to endure in five years for not being able to conceive. Since she failed to give

birth to a child, her husband

became suspicious, and went to a doctor for check-up. The doctor had told them that he was responsible for the wife’s barrenness. But he did not tell the truth to all for fear of being called impotent. As a result, Saraswati had to bear the blame of infertility alone. Eventually, she had to leave home. “I had to forgo my home and family in order to make my husband a real man,” she says.

Pain and suffering increased. Lonely life is full of difficulties. “Sweet sentiments of Bishnu Prasad of my village gradually won my heart. After

he accepted me for what I was, I married him,” Saraswati says. Bishnu Prasad also says his marital life is very blissful. He had known something about her pain. She was innocent. Despite that she was thrown out of the house for not producing a child. Her ability to endure pain, and her habit of not harboring ill feelings to others no matter how deep a trouble attracted Bishnu Prasad. This turned into love.

“That is why I decided to marry her. I also wanted to show that men are also equally responsible for family estrangement. Fortunately, Sarawati

gave birth to a son within a year of our marriage,” says Bishnu Prasad.

Pointing to his first-born child, Bishnu says: “This is the son who saw that a woman has more role in reproduction.”

They want this message to be spread all over the world. Therefore, they have named their son Sandesh [which means “message” in Nepali].

Not a single person said even once that Saraswati had no fault in not being able to conceive. Both her in-laws and her maternal family advised her to take help from shamans. She says: “As I was illiterate, I went to many places where shamans lived, but all in vain. This was all because my husband had biological defects. I used to feel sad time and again, thinking that I was not

able to give birth to a child. I felt that I was living a useless life.”

To add to her woe, her brothers did not treat her well in her maternal house. “Now I have everything that a person needs to live a life—husband, children, some property and a well-built house,” Saraswati says. All are happy with Saraswati now, including her maternal family, new in-laws and villagers. In happiness, she says happiness surely follows sadness, but one should continue to do *karma* unflinchingly. She vividly remembers her difficult days—she had worked hard in fields, carried loads of grass from forest and had to eat beaten rice at night. She says education plays a crucial role in changing a traditional belief that a woman must not remarry even if her first marriage fails. She gives the entire credit for her second marriage to her second husband who took the initiative.

She did not take any legal recourse, though her in-laws threw her out of the house. Since she was illiterate, she needed support from her maternal

family. But no such assistance was coming forth. Now she lives a comfortable life. She did not want to take any property from her first husband. “I just want to say that both men and women may be responsible for not being able to reproduce. Both

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should go for medical check-up to find out whose weakness it is. Then proper treatment should be done. Let no woman get tagged as infertile without any reason. In fact, the accusation of barrenness is very difficult to bear,” she says.

She wants to tell the family of her first husband and innocent women that men could be the cause of women’s infertility. She thinks women need some courage so that they can take right decisions at the right time. After her first husband abandoned her, the maternal house was her sole source of hope. But the maternal family did not treat her well. Despite her suffering, it took her weeks to accept Bishnu Prasad’s marriage proposal.

Courtesy By

Sancharika Samuha

Selling corn on the cob for livelihood

Although the price of kerosene they use in lighting their lamps in the morning and evening has quadrupled, there has not been any change in the price of the corn on the cob they sell. Occasional bandhs (strikes) and embargoes called by political parties have created such a situation that their daily bread could be snatched away.

➤ By Pabitra Dhakal

“There is no one to stand by me in times of happiness and sadness. I will earn a livelihood by roasting corn as long as my arms assist me.”

It has been 24 years since Dilmaya Shrestha started selling corn on the cob at Shahidchowk, Narayangadh. She is more than 61 years old. However, her enthusiasm to be self-reliant had not diminished a bit.

Since she could not save money in time, Dilmaya is facing financial difficulty. She had earned money by roasting corn. However, she had to run a household, pay for her children’s education and nurturing—all on her own, without her husband’s support. How can she save?

She spent all her income on rearing her children, and due to various reasons she had not been able to save now, though she lives alone. There is no business during summer. Winter is the best season to sell corn. She had a bitter experience of regular *bandhs*, (strikes) and embargoes that hampered her daily business.

Earlier, corn worth Rs 500 could be sold in a day. Today, even if one sits by the fire throughout the day to sell corn, one cannot even get back the principal amount. She is increasingly worried that if such a situation prevails she would have to die without getting any food.

Hounded by deprivation and suppression all her life, she has no property, save for small space on the roadside. The heat of fire and the scorching sun are her everyday friends. For her, someone who buys and eats the corn she sells is her kin. A daughter and two grandsons depend on her. She lives in a rented room.

“Everyone says we will work for the welfare of the poor. But who has done what? Instead they are closing down our source of livelihood. No one does

anything for the poor,” says Dilmaya angrily. At the twilight of her life, Dilmaya is in search of support.

Despite working hard day in and day out for her children, she had to go without meals many a time. Now all her children have grown up. They are earning their own livelihoods. But their behavior does not satisfy her. Even though she has children and grandchildren, she is still burdened.

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roadside. The heat of fire and the scorching sun are her everyday friends. For her, someone who buys and eats the corn she sells is her kin. A daughter and two grandsons depend on her. She lives in a rented room.

Dilmaya is rustic yet friendly, and is liked by all. She plays with coals the whole day to roast corn so that she can keep her fireplace burning twice a day. Customers can be seen sitting around her, eating corn and talking to her. With an increase in the number of roasted corn sellers, her customers have decreased. This has affected her business. However, she is determined to make a living by selling corns until she dies.

Dilamaya says: “I do not like the behavior of those who get overindulgent in times of happiness and who panic in times of difficulty. Challenges can be overcome in life.” She was the first person to start this business in Narayangadh.

Shreemaya Tamang followed her suit in Narayangadh. It was her source of satisfaction in times of difficulty. After her husband became ill and was unable to work, she joined this business four years ago. The responsibility of keeping her eight-member family afloat is on her shoulders.

She does not have a house. Her income is spent on providing her family with food, clothes and shelter. She has been living in a rented apartment at Chhetrapur in Bharatpur Municipality-2. The fact that the selling price of corn has not increased, though the price of kerosene used in lighting a lamp or stove has quadrupled, saddens Shreemaya.

“The prices of commodities that we need to buy have skyrocketed. But we have to sell corn that we roast without including the price of our labor. It would have been quite ok if the business could pick up the earlier pace. But now the business has come to a halt.” She is worried about the addition of challenges to her livelihood.

This is not the case of Dilmaya and Shreemaya alone. Goma, a resident of Hetauda, has also been selling corn in Narayangadh for the past nine years. Before coming to Narayangadh, she used to sell roasted corn at Hetauda Bazaar for four years. Additional financial burden fell upon her after the sudden death of her husband. Goma, who was mourning the death of her husband, had to look after her children. Since the earnings she made in Hetauda could not keep her family afloat, she migrated to Narayangadh to sell roasted corn.

Initially, her business did well. She had no problems running her household. Call it God's will or bad luck, her business took a downturn. "Earlier, corn worth Rs 500-600 was sold in a day. Now I do business that hardly brings Rs 300 per day. It is difficult to provide meals even twice a day, after deducting business expenses. How to finance the education of two sons?" Goma is worried.

These women, who have been selling corn on pavements, do not care about sun, rain, storm and cold. They travel

great distance to purchase corn and sell roasted corn round the year. Nineteen women laborers of Narayangadh, who take in dust, smoke and the heat of fire, not only earn a livelihood, but also pay Rs 3 per day as tax to the municipality. Though their income is low, the way they have been paying tax sincerely to the municipality is exemplary when juxtaposed with those who amass a lot of property by evading tax. Their courageous move and strong hands continues to teach self-employment to the unemployed youths.

Courtesy by

Sancharika Samuha

Mountain women exhibit courage

Dorpu Bazaar is an entry point to the district capital from eastern and south Solukhumbu. That is why the daily mobility of people is high here. However, until a year and a half ago, a river that lies in the middle of Dorpu Bazaar used to give trouble to travellers. Now there is a small bridge over the river. Likewise, a culvert is built nearby. President of the Group Bina Shrestha says: "Our group constructed the small bridge and culvert."

➤ **By Kavita Guragain**

The story is some months old. The mother-in-law, brother-in-law and her husband came down heavily on her. The family lives in Dorpu Bazaar of Salleri-7 (Solukhumbu). They defamed her in public. They even threatened to throw her out of the house. However, at the initiative of a local women's group, she received some relief. The perpetrators were warned not to repeat this kind of maltreatment. Tulsi Rajbhandari, of the Women's Awareness Group, says: "We will not tolerate any kind of injustice and pain unleashed on women. Our hands will not tremble while taking action against the perpetrators, whoever they may be."

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over the river. Likewise, a culvert is built nearby. President of the Group Bina Shrestha says: "Our group constructed the narrow bridge and culverts. Trails that used to get muddy even when people walked now sees a long line of mules. There is no problem. Such tasks are not men's alone. Even women can do them."

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On Tourism Day last year, the District Development Committee organized an inter-community cultural dance and song competition for alleviation of rural poverty. The Women's Awareness Group won the competition. The manger of the Group, Sujata Tamang, says: "This is an example that shows we women, who are said to be weak, can do all types of tasks."

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These are a few examples. The Women's Awareness Group that was formed at the women's initiative in Dorpu Bazaar has worked for women's empowerment for four years. The

Group has been justifying its relevance. “After the formation of the Group, villages have started to look clean. Men, who used to consume alcohol, create ruckus and trouble women, are now tamed,” says Chitra Rajbhandari, manager of the Group.

According to Bina Shrestha, women are aware of education, rights and discrimination. The Group has contributed to developing confidence that women can work every bit as good as men. Local reformer and member of the Youngster Club Buddhi Kumar Rajbhandari says: “Signs of change have been seen within and outside the house after the formation of the Group. Most important of all, they also became clever and were able to bring their children on the right track.”

Some members of this group are working women, some do business while others are housewives. But all give their time for the Group. They save some money. The saving is mobilized among the Group members for some income-generating activities. The interest generated from the savings is credited to the Group’s account. They have used the money thus deposited in constructing a community building with the help of another women’s group. Chitra Rajbhandari says: “From now onwards, all finances and operations will be conducted from our own office.”

The Youngster Club had given land for the women’s group to construct a building. This is the first building of the women’s group in Solukhumbu. Because of the concerted efforts of women, these women have shown that they can do everything. Members of the Group discuss various kinds of maltreatment of women and settle the issues.

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the Group discuss various kinds of maltreatment of women and settle the issues. “Village issues should be addressed within the village. This will promote unity,” says Tulsi Rajbhandari.

Members of the Women’s Awareness Group are not only engaged in guiding themselves and other members towards self-reliance, but they are also running various programs on a community radio. Dawasangmu Tamang, Manjula Rajbhandari, Radhika Shrestha, Heena Rajbhandari, Sujata Tamang, Dambar Kumari Rajbhandari and Santu Nepali run women-related programmes on Solu Radio—a community radio. All of them are members of the Group. The members act in dramas, advertisements and message-oriented programs whose target group is women. Hearing them on radio, women of other places are also gearing up for self-reliance and empowerment.

Courtesy By

Sancharika Samuha

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Sancharika Samuha was established by a group of women communicator's in April 1996, with the primary aim of promotion of gender equality in Nepal. The Sancharika Feature Service incorporates monthly articles/features on the grave situation of women and children in our country, the social outlook towards them, the pain and agony that they have faced and the courageous steps that women have taken in this regard. We hope to fulfill the lack of news and articles on women and children to some extent through this feature service and we look forward to your kind support in publishing these articles in your respective newspapers. We would also like to request you to send us a copy of the published article and to mention 'Sancharika Feature Service' below the published article.

● **Sancharika Samuha Nepal**