

Social networks and migration: Women's livelihoods between Far West Nepal and Delhi

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Introduction

Poverty, unemployment, a scarcity of natural resources, and the only recently ended Maoist insurgency are major reasons why international labour migration has become an increasingly important source of income for Nepal. For younger people it is also a way to experience the wider world and a “rite of passage” for young men (Brusle 2008). The latest census in 2001 (CBS *et al.* 2002) indicates that 3.3% or 762,181 people are living abroad. Of total migrants, 12% are female and 77% have gone to India. The major destinations of the remaining 23% are the Gulf States, Malaysia, Japan, and South Korea. The more recent Nepal Living Standard Survey states that 24.4% of all households (approximately 1,120,846) receive remittances from abroad (see CBS *et al.* 2004: 74), and that 4.63% of all inhabitants were absent in 2003 (Kollmair *et al.* 2006). Nationally, the most valid estimate of the total inflow of remittances is NRs 44 billion in 2003, equivalent to approximately USD 604 million (Graner and Seddon 2004). This sum is nearly double the total multilateral and bilateral foreign aid grants and loans to Nepal (NRs 23.7 billion) for the same year.

Although migrants to neighbouring India send less than 20% of the total amount of remittances (Kollmair *et al.* 2006), India remains the most popular destination and labour migration to India helps many people to secure their livelihoods in many different ways. The majority of migrants from Far West Nepal go to India—and in our case study to Delhi. Although migration potentially generates remittances and entrepreneurial activities, it raises a series of crucial issues such as a reduction in available village labour and the extra responsibilities it imposes in particular on women, the living conditions of the migrants in alien environments, and the need to go back and forth between two or more places. In Nepal in general and particularly in the villages we investigated, it is common for men to seek work abroad and leave their families behind. However, in some cases women also come to India for shorter periods of time, especially for medical treatment and to give birth. But some women also stay for longer and find new dimensions to life. Although migration from Nepal has increasingly been the subject of research since the 1990s (e.g. Kansakar 1973-74; Gurung 1987; Subedi 1993; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2001; Seddon *et al.* 2001; Upreti 2002; Thieme 2006; Bruslé 2008; Sharma 2008), there are very few publications about gender and migration in Nepal. Shrestha and Conway (2001) describe ‘the shadow life of a migrant’s wife’.

Molesworth (2001), Brown (2003) and Kaspar (2005) look at the effects of migration on the women who remain in the villages. Two publications cover the situation of women as migrants (HMG *et al.* 2003; Sancharika Samuha and UNIFEM 2003). The paucity of research on women's migration in Nepal might be linked to the fact that migration is predominantly a male practice. For example, in 1998, the Government of Nepal officially banned female migration to the Gulf States in response to cases of physical abuse of Nepalese women in the Middle East. This ban was controversial and was lifted and reimposed several times. Following the latest amendment at the beginning of 2009, women are not allowed to migrate for domestic work to the Gulf States and Malaysia. We want to contribute to fill this research gap by presenting a case study of women's livelihoods in the context of labour migration, both as migrants themselves and as women who remain in the villages. The migrants originate from Bajura district of the Far Western Development Region, where migration to India has been a common occurrence for several generations and the economy can be described as "agri-migratory" (Bruslé 2008: 241). The analysis sheds light on women's individual aspirations as well as their position within their families and communities. It also explores how kinship networks and social capital shape women's lives and whether migration facilitates social change. We therefore use Bourdieu's capital theory and the transnational migration approach as an analytical starting point, and structure the article as follows. First, we introduce the theoretical and methodological framework. Secondly, we provide a brief overview of recent patterns of labour migration from the case study area. In the main body of the article, we outline the life of women who do not migrate, as well as the working and living conditions and ways of saving money of women in Delhi. We emphasize how kinship networks shape women's lives in Delhi and in their place of origin, and how these two places are interlinked. Taking both places into consideration also explains better the extent to which women challenge traditional structures through migration to their own benefit, but also the related risks with which they have to cope. Since in our cases women never migrate alone but come with their husbands, we will also spend some time describing the situation of their husbands.

Theoretical framework and methodology

The theoretical framework for the analysis of the everyday practices of labour migrants and the role of social capital is provided by Bourdieu's capital theory and the concept of transnational migration. Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). All forms of capital are dynamic and can be transformed into one another. The extent of social capital available to individuals

depends on the extent of the social relationships that can be mobilised in a given context and the amount of other kinds of capital, such as economic or cultural capital, that members of networks can muster (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital is not a community but an individual asset. There tends to be an unequal distribution of power and the potential for inequality to be reproduced. In the same way, social capital not only advances but also constrains individual action. To grasp the dynamics of spatial mobility and the linkages between place of origin and new place of work we rely on the transnational migration approach (cf. Pries 1999). Migrants do not uproot themselves but instead move back and forth, often but not always crossing international borders as they do so (Thieme 2008). Migration affects both those family members who do not migrate and those who do. They all have to renegotiate their positions and needs; this can open up new opportunities, but it can also reinforce or create new power imbalances. Here, the contrast between the remote rural area of origin and the megacity of Delhi is of particular importance. Delhi not only provides access to work, but also a social environment in which traditional rules can be challenged. The fieldwork for this study was carried out in Far West Nepal and Delhi between 1999 and 2004. At first, a quantitative household survey and qualitative interviews were conducted in several villages of the districts Bajura and Bajhang in the Far Western Development Region (Müller 2001; Kollmair 2003; Müller-Böker 2003). Two meetings were held with the members of local women (ama)-group with a particular focus on women. Women performed their traditional dances and songs, which are customarily performed while visiting their own family home (*maiti ghar*) for us. In addition, we were able to conduct 15 interviews with women and without any men being present.

The research in Far West Nepal had to be interrupted due to security problems and has only recently resumed in late 2008. Nevertheless, from 2004 and 2008, we were able to observe the developments in Nepal closely through regular visits to the country. Between 2002 and 2004, fieldwork was conducted in Delhi, where we approached migrants from the study villages in Far West Nepal (Thieme 2006). In this article, we focus on young and middle-aged married women from two villages in the Bajura District of Far West Nepal, whose husbands stayed in Delhi or they themselves did. A total of about 110 persons from both villages were in Delhi during our research there. Thirty-one people were interviewed in depth, many of them three times over a period of two years. Out of the total number of interviewees, five were women. Four of the interviewed women had already been living in Delhi for a longer period and one woman only came for medical treatment. During the periods of fieldwork, seven village-based financial self-help groups (called *societies*) were in existence; six of them only had male members and one exclusively female members. We

attended several society meetings and obtained data from observation and group discussions.

Bajura District - the place of origin

The Bajura district has one of the lowest human development and gender equity indices within Nepal (UNDP 2002), exemplified by the level of education. Despite a noticeable improvement in recent years, the male literacy rate of 65.3 % is in line with the national average of 64.5%, but the 27.4% literacy rate among women is still significantly lower than the already low national average of 33.8% (CBS *et al.* 2004). Also, agricultural output for key products like rice, maize and wheat is 20% below the average (HMG and MOA 2005). Compared to other regions of the country, Far West Nepal still lacks adequate basic infrastructure such as electricity, schools and medical facilities. Depending on weather conditions, the nearest road is a minimum one-day walk away. The vast majority of inhabitants belongs to the so-called 'hill castes', which form the largest group in Nepal (Bista 2004). The majority of the population (79%) belongs to the 'pure' high Hindu castes, which are distinctly separate from the 'impure' or occupational castes such as tailors or blacksmiths. The traditional patron-client system plays an important role (Cameron 1998) and it has existed between high-caste and occupational-caste households for generations. The family system in Far West Nepal is patrilineal and patrilocal, which adds an extra dimension to the migration context. After the arranged marriage, the wife leaves the native home (*maiti*) and moves into her parents-in-law's house (*ghar*), where she bears the main responsibility for domestic and agricultural work (Müller-Böker 2003). In summary, the population is embedded in a tight network of caste and relational structures, which can be supportive but also constricting.

Migration from Far West Nepal

Impoverishment, food shortages, indebtedness, social discrimination, and a lack of infrastructure have been causing large-scale labour migration to India for generations. The political instability of recent years has exacerbated this migration. The longstanding history of labour migration and the free border movement between Nepal and India has led to transnational social networks, by which people sustain contacts between families in Nepal and migrants in India. People generally migrate to the same places as previous migrants. In the case study, Delhi was the main destination, but other urban centres such as Mumbai, Bangalore or Uttarakhand are also popular destinations (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2001; Brusle 2008, Sharma 2008). The two villages we focused on have 600 people altogether, and 9% of them were absent in 2000, meaning that at least one

person in nearly every household works in India. Most of them were staying in Delhi for a duration of between a few months and several years. Usually men migrate for labour and women stay in Far West Nepal. However, 17% of absent migrants were female (Müller 2001).

Women who do not migrate

The majority of migrants are male, and women stay in the villages with their parents-in-law. An impressive event in woman's life takes place at certain festivals, when married women are allowed to visit their parents' homes. They dance, sing and complain in their songs about how men always gamble, drink and leave the village for work, the tyranny of the mother-in-law and about their very hard daily work. Indeed, as interviews in Bajura and Delhi have shown, gambling seems to be common practice among men. "Most of the men are gambling, mostly for money or loans, sometimes also for land or jewelry—also what we are wearing—or even for kitchenware" (45-year-old woman).

Women have—in the setting we have described above—controversial wishes and needs. Emotionally they are bound to their family of origin as well as to their daughters. But from a strategic point of view they have to invest in the patrilineal group of relatives, last but not least because they and their children depend on the social networks of their husband's family.

For example, in the villages, the mother groups provide brief midwife training to selected women. The female group members themselves exclude unmarried women: "After all, training unmarried women does not benefit the village" (ca. 80-year-old women). In the same line of argumentation, we heard several statements by women concerning girl's education: they regard it as a mistaken investment.

The migration of husbands changes the wives' possibilities to move within the given setting only marginally and might even reduce it. Because women do not have their own relatives, a husband's absence increases their dependency on their husband's family and can increase a wife's isolation within the household and the village. Their bargaining power within the family does not usually increase. It is the next oldest male household member who becomes head of the household in the husband's absence. The majority of women we interviewed did not express any explicit criticism; some even argued in favour of this power imbalance. For example, one girl answered the question as to which household member carries the key of the moneybox by saying: "The oldest man carries it, because the key should be with the most educated person who is able to count and add up" (17-year-old girl).

Additionally, women have to manage a higher workload as other studies have also confirmed (Niraula & Morgan 2000; Molesworth 2001; Brown 2003). Women are heavily involved in domestic work, caring, agricultural work, collecting firewood, water and fodder, and the illegal gathering of products from nearby Khaptad National Park. Women frequently referred to this unbalanced workload: “We work much more than men. Men are gambling, drinking and hanging around” (ca. 80-year-old woman) or: “They (men) only do some of the work in the field, that’s not a lot. They only do the ploughing” (about 30-year-old woman).

Nevertheless, women depend on mutual help from male household members if their husbands are away in Delhi. At the same time, they also depend on the remittances from Delhi, although they do not necessarily receive these on a regular basis. In some cases, the only relief for the family is to feed one person less (also Pfaff 1995). However, the occasional visits by men from Delhi are a ritual and are celebrated by the whole village. To show their success, the migrants are expected to bring expensive consumer goods. They dress in urban style, and bring new saris for the women and radios. Many women also perceive these short visits by their husband as a burden. “They come and visit all their friends and relatives; they command and upbraid us, and then they leave again,” one woman stated.

Access to working and housing in Delhi

Male and female migrants rely on village-based networks to establish themselves in the urban environment and to get work, accommodation and medical care. During fieldwork, male relatives arrived to look for a job in Delhi, or else family members came for medical treatment. In such cases, relatives and friends in Delhi are obliged to provide them with support and shelter. Newcomers live with their kin, which reduces the already congested spaces even more. Because it is mostly men who arrive, women have to cope with the male-dominated environment and care for the extended household. Women particularly mentioned the lack of support networks among women. Women as well as men complained about their limited physical space and privacy, said they missed trees, greenery and the clean air they have in the village. Women have limited spatial mobility. They live with their families in single huts (*jhuggis*) in the middle of the quarter where their husbands work as watchmen. Their workplace is in walking distance of their shelter: shopping, fetching water, meeting other women – all these activities take place within walking distance. Their children could also walk to school. Nevertheless, women also confirmed that their husbands do not want their wives travelling long distances alone because they fear for their safety. This limited spatial

mobility is not necessarily different to men's mobility. While some men knew Delhi quite well and sometimes travelled longer distances to visit friends or relatives, other men clearly stated that they had never left the quarter where they live. If the women have come for medical treatment, they are often too weak to leave anyway, and their husbands accompany them to more distant hospitals.

The labour market for unskilled migrants is highly gender-segregated. Regardless of caste, the vast majority of the male and mainly unskilled migrants interviewed work as night watchmen and clean cars in the early morning, having taken over those jobs from friends and co-villagers. None of the women in Nepal and in Delhi interviewed mentioned that the primary motive to go to Delhi was for work. All of them came either in a very bad state of health or when pregnant with the purpose of seeking medical treatment and perinatal care in Delhi. Later on, they had stayed in Delhi to raise their children in Delhi or had brought them from Nepal, if they had stayed behind.

Women in particular make use of the social networks of their husbands or male kin, who organise jobs for them, and it is the men who accompany their women to negotiate with their employers. Women prefer to work for only one household, yet many women work for up to six, one to two hours per day for each household (cp. also Neetha 2003). They therefore have to acquaint themselves with the different requirements of each of the employers. They receive about IRs 100-300 per household per month, working one to two hours per day for each household. The average salary among the women was IRs 1,067. However, it includes women who worked only for one household two hours per day for IRs 300 per month, as well as one woman who worked full-time and was paid IRs 2,000. Women argued that their income is necessary because men do not earn enough and the children's education is costly. As a mother of two children stated: "My children's education is quite expensive. They need a good education. They go to government schools but they are not very good and crowded. I pay for an extra teacher, which costs IRs 250 per month for each child" (August, 2003, Delhi).

Women's household chores, changing workplaces and time schedules for the different houses where they work add to the high pressure of daily life. A day starts at 5 am with cooking and the household routine. From 6 till 11 am, she carries out her paid domestic work. From 11 am till 3 pm, she prepares lunch, cares for the house and the children. From 4 till 6 pm or sometimes 8 pm, she goes out to work again. Afterwards she returns home, cooks, and takes care of the children and the home. The husband usually works from 7 pm till 10 am. The family members have different time schedules: because of night duty, men generally sleep during the day and if the woman is at work as well, the children stay at home unattended.

Watchmen's wives are left alone during the night in their neglected housing quarters, where they are scared of being attacked.

Access to savings and credit possibilities

Migrants often need more money than they earn per month, first as seed capital to establish themselves in Delhi and to pay their predecessor for the job, and later on to support their families back home and to repay their debts. Drinking and gambling are also reasons why men need money. To obtain loans, migrants often rely on loans from financial self-help organisation. Different kinds exist, but here we focus on 'societies' (Thieme & Müller-Böcker 2004, Thieme, 2006). In these organisations, migrants once more rely on interpersonal ties to ensure creditworthiness and trust, which is a characteristic of social capital. Along with saving and lending money, they also form social networks, providing jobs and support in Delhi. Men dominate these societies, although women are generally allowed to participate. The obvious reason for this is that the majority of migrants in Delhi are male. Another reason is that men see themselves as representing the whole family and women leave "money matters" to their husbands.

We came across with one society in Delhi that was run by 41 women from different villages in the Bajura district. The members of the women's society were from the high Chhetri caste (thar/clan lineage: Rawal) as well as the occupational castes Kami (thar: Luhar) and Damai (thar: Dholi). However the relations are based on the kinship and patron-client network in the husband's village and its neighbourhood. The society was led by a Chhetri woman. Members of the society emphasised that it would be impossible to have a society of such different castes in the traditional village setting.

Three of the women initially interviewed took part in this women's society. The society was established in May 2002 and is—as far as the women knew—unique among migrants from Bajura. They got the idea of establishing a society from their husbands, who were all involved in other societies, and they ran it in a similar way to the men's society. The women had not been organised in Nepal before. All of them had been living in Delhi for quite a long time already. As long-term residents, they are busy all day and do not have much time for socialising. Therefore, these women wanted to form their exclusively female social space, as one woman stated: "We did not want men in our society because we do not want to witness how our husbands sit together and drink. And many wives are too shy in the presence of their husbands." (August, 2003 in Delhi)

The society meeting is held once a month on a set date and at a fixed time in a public garden. It is always a very special day for the women and

they dress in their best saris. The members initially contributed one payment of IRs 100 each. Members can draw loans from this amount, at an interest rate of 5% per month. Due to interest repayments, the volume of the society account increases. As a result, members have a better chance of borrowing larger sums of money and the value of the member's savings also increases. Another major reason was to save money and to spend it primarily on their children's education. At the beginning, there were only 11 women. Over the course of time, more women became members and children did too. Children do not borrow money, but their mothers have more shares in the society, because they pay in IRs 100 for each child. In August 2003, the society had 41 members, including 28 children. Women took loans of between IRs 1,000 and 5,000. The money was spent on a broad range of family needs and to cover debts. For example, the chairwoman had once taken out an IRs 2,000 loan because her brother-in-law was visiting Delhi and had asked for money to repay debts for his daily needs in Far West Nepal. Women also contribute to life-cycle events such as weddings and funerals. However, women frequently highlighted that their highest priority is expenditure on better food, health and education for their children. Because it is money they have saved up themselves, they also felt greater independence due to the fact that men often waste their money on gambling and alcohol.

The reproduction and challenge of social relations through migration

Migration from Far West Nepal is often referred to as "eating out" (also Pfaff-Czarnecka 2001). Each person less reduces a household's total food consumption. At the same time, the non-migrating household members receive remittances, which in 2004 ranged from €17 to €520 and were on average €88 per year (Thieme 2006). In rural communities with little cash income, even small transfers of cash can be highly valuable and help to reduce the risks of seasonal variation, harvest failure and food shortage, as other case studies in the neighbouring Bajhang district have confirmed (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2001). In Delhi, one society run by men even reduced food shortages for the whole village in Bajura by investing in a food storehouse and also building a school and paying a teacher. The women in Delhi, who established their society to save for individual purposes, in particular for their children's education, jointly contributed IRs 1,500 to a school project in Bajura District to fund infrastructure back home, although their own children lived with them in Delhi. Dense networks between Delhi and Nepal make migration less risky for individuals by circulating information among potential migrants and providing access to jobs. Having family members in India assures access to medical treatment and schooling in India, and migrants cover these expenditures rather than

sending money to Nepal (Thieme 2006). In Delhi, migrants have to structure a part of their life-paths afresh; some institutions remain, others change. If women come along and stay for a long period, men are a source of both financial and social capital. Even in Delhi, women depend on the traditional patrilineal and patrilocal family networks in which normative expectations such as kinship obligations are reinforced. Nonetheless, in keeping these patterns, they gain a new economic independency, by earning their own money and—in one case—managing a society. Medical treatment is also a positive factor that improves women's lives in Delhi. However, the opportunity women most frequently cited was their children's education (boys and girls) in the hope that their children would have a better life. Equal investment in the education of boys and girls is especially remarkable given that the education of women in Far West Nepal is much lower than for men.

The migration ties between the villages and Delhi are inter-generational and reproduce social structures. At the same time, they do transform traditional structures. While traditional elder high caste males are the dominating decision makers in their villages, people who were formerly excluded can also participate or even take a lead in Delhi-based organisations. Working in the same job irrespective of caste or mixed caste membership of credit associations are another example of the dissolution of traditionally practised caste barriers. Also the members of the women's society were from both high and occupational castes. Although relations are based on kinship and patron-client networks, women said that it would be impossible to have a society with the same caste composition in the traditional setting of the village. If parents-in-law come to Delhi for a visit, they always argue about this caste interaction and—as one woman said—“want to show that they are ‘pure’ Chhetris” (August 2003 in Delhi). She labelled these disagreements a typical generation conflict. However, the society only meets in public places such as gardens, because traditionally Chhetris do not allow occupational castes to enter their houses. The women claimed that so far they had never faced any problems due to the different castes, last but not least because “we do not consume alcohol and do not fight”, as one society member put it (2003, Delhi). In spite of this slight erosion of the caste system, being from a specific locality, i.e., a related village in Nepal remained a precondition for membership, even if people have lived in Delhi for over a decade. Spatial distance is another major reason why not all women and men with a common place of origin necessarily have contact with each other in Delhi. Women only meet if they live within walking distance of each other. This is due to security reasons, time constraints, and having children in the house.

Risks and limitations of migration

Although migrants are not the poorest of the poor, all of them are vulnerable and seem to live on the edge. It is only a small step from being able to survive and thrive, and suddenly losing this ability. What the majority lacks is bridging social capital as well as sufficient cultural and economic capital. With their work as watchmen and car cleaners, and their existing financial self-help groups, men have managed to find an economic niche in Delhi. But migrants have to cope daily with poor working and living conditions, bribes, and the lack of redress for abuses by employers. Their informal work, lack of bridging social capital and poor education all contribute to this. Women, for example frequently mentioned how problematic it would be that they were illiterate. Of the women interviewed, only one could read and write. It makes women even more vulnerable and exposes them to the daily routine of shopping, helping their children with schoolwork and negotiating with their employers. As one woman put it: "Other better—educated women can speak better with them and bargain, but I am illiterate—I can't" (2003, Delhi). Life in Delhi was considered as hard as life in Nepal, but the physical work assessed as less hard than in the mountains. Male migrants frequently reported that their societies had collapsed due to the lack of reliable members, but women saw alcohol and the resulting violence as the major reason for this. According to the women, men's drinking and gambling habits get worse in Delhi and place an additional financial burden on the whole family. The more men are exposed to alcohol and gambling and the greater their prospects of earning money, the more they feel they will be able to manage their debts, providing a false sense of security. Because of high interest rates of 3-10% per month, indebtedness is not only a risk for the migrant, but also for the migrant's family who have stayed behind in the village. If the migrant cannot repay debts, the family stands to lose their land, livestock and other belongings. People borrow from one source to repay the other and are tied into an expanding network of credit dependency with their family and kin, forcing them to stay in Delhi and work. Women also use their society to repay family debts. However, the chairwoman and other members frequently emphasized that the women's society is distinct from many societies run by men, because they are confident that they have their debts much more under control and that they only spend money on necessities.

Regardless of whether they migrate seasonally or spend the majority of the year in Delhi, most migrants have their families in Nepal. The migrants felt forced to go to Delhi and they do not feel 'at home' in Delhi. All of them dream of going back to Nepal. Because they want to return, they have to maintain their village-based networks. These networks

enable them to migrate, but also constrain them. Social networks are essential to a person's survival in a village and agricultural community cooperation and in patron-client dependencies (cp. also Bista 1999). It is risky—both in Nepal and in India—to disregard an existing circle of networks unless migrants have the option of entering a new circle. The aspects of life in the migrant's place of origin are perceived as being complementary to those in the current workplace. This "illusion of return" is also often one reason why men do not plan for the longer term and do not bring their wives and children to Delhi. Other reasons are that men do not feel able to finance their family in Delhi and do not want their wives to work. Certainly, with a family in Delhi, men would be much more under the control of their wives.

Conclusion

The longstanding history of labour migration between Nepal and India has led to transnational social networks through which contacts between families in Nepal and migrants in India are sustained. Relations and customs can change over time and from one generation to the next, and migration can be a supportive vehicle for this. The networks are primarily based on kin or neighbouring villages, and dominated by men. For the women, men are a source of both financial and social capital but also reinforce normative expectations such as kinship obligations. The outcome of the migration process takes many different forms. Debt seems to be a tool or panacea to manage livelihoods and ensures that they remain migrants for their whole lives. Women are trapped in this cycle by their family and kinship structures. Various material and normative constraints (prevalent in Nepal as well as in Delhi) hamper Nepalese women's transnational practices. Their ability to move and build their own life-worlds is highly limited or framed by culturally gendered rules that permeate their transnational social fields. In this way, we conclude that gender inequality is magnified for the majority of women who remain in Far West Nepal, but challenged by women live in Delhi for longer. Women who remain in Far West Nepal do not gain more independence or bargaining power within the household. Their workload increases and they are dependent on remittances from their husbands. Many women who come to Delhi for the first time or even simply stay for a short while for medical reasons find their sense of self is challenged. They are not used to the urban environment and do not have much time to adapt, especially if they arrive in bad health. But women who stay for longer find new dimensions to life, not all of which they perceive as constraints. Some structures also enable them to do things they were not able to do before. Although women depend more on their male kin while they settle down in

Delhi, they nevertheless have the advantage of better medical treatment and education for their children. It is an opportunity for them to begin to challenge traditional structures by earning their own money, little though it is, and forming their own societies. Having a society offers them the possibility to use their own money for productive purposes and to get greater control over expenses and investments. Furthermore, the traditionally severe constraints exerted by the rules of caste interaction are loosened.

Acknowledgement: The research is embedded in the NCCR North-South (Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South) and is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC).

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