

## Patterns of Migration-induced feminization in the Agricultural Workforce of Tamil Nadu

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### Abstract

The migration of male agricultural workers from rural Tamil Nadu to urban areas has significantly reshaped the region’s agricultural workforce, leading to the feminization of agriculture. As men move to cities in search of better employment, women increasingly take on farming responsibilities, altering traditional gender roles and household dynamics. This transition has had profound economic and social implications, affecting agricultural productivity, land ownership, and access to essential resources. Women farmers now manage crucial agricultural tasks, yet they continue to face systemic challenges, including limited access to land, financial credit, and modern farming technologies. Despite their growing participation, gender disparities persist in wages, decision-making power, and recognition of their contributions. These structural barriers hinder women’s ability to fully engage in sustainable agricultural practices and improve their economic well-being. Migration-induced feminization has also influenced rural communities, creating both opportunities and burdens for female agricultural workers. While women gain autonomy and control over farming decisions, they must also balance demanding agricultural work with domestic responsibilities, resulting in increased workloads and limited economic mobility. The absence of male laborers has made women central to maintaining rural livelihoods, but societal norms often restrict their ability to benefit fully from their expanded roles. Policy interventions play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Government initiatives such as employment guarantee schemes and self-help groups aim to empower women, but gaps in implementation and gender biases persist. Strengthening policies that support female farmers, ensuring equitable access to resources, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices can enhance rural development and economic stability. This study underscores the importance of gender-inclusive agricultural policies to support the evolving role of women in Tamil Nadu’s farming sector. Future research should explore long-term impacts, focusing on solutions to bridge gender disparities and strengthen rural economies.

**Keywords:** Women Farmers, Migration, Feminization of Agriculture, Transformation.

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### 1. Introduction

Tamil Nadu in southern India is famous for being known as a mainly agrarian economy for a long time. Tamil Nadu’s society has depended on agriculture, as a big part of the rural population is involved in agricultural work to earn a living. However, over the

last few decades, industry has undergone many changes owing to factors such as the movement from rural to urban areas, city growth, and changing patterns of land use. The agricultural workforce now has more women, which has mainly resulted from the changes mentioned earlier.

## 1.1. Overview of the agricultural sector in Tamil Nadu

For years, Tamil Nadu's rural economy has strongly relied on its agricultural sector. Rice, millets, pulses, cotton, sugarcane, and groundnut are all among the various crops produced in this state. Rural areas depend significantly on agriculture for jobs, as both the sector and its activities indirectly support many people. Despite its importance, the contribution of the mining sector to the country's total GDP has declined over the years. People spend more on entertainment because of urban growth, more industries, and larger service industries. Farming continues to be an essential part of Tamil Nadu's economy, as it provides

work to more than half of the people living in rural areas. Because smallholder farmers are responsible for producing much of the world's food, they often deal with monsoons that are difficult to predict, higher costs of farm products, and fewer chances to borrow money, all of which contribute to the problems faced by rural workers. The introduction of modern mechanical farming methods has changed the way people work (Srinivasan 2016). Feminization of agriculture is now very important, as the number of female agricultural workers has increased because many men in the farming industry are moving to cities (Figure 1).

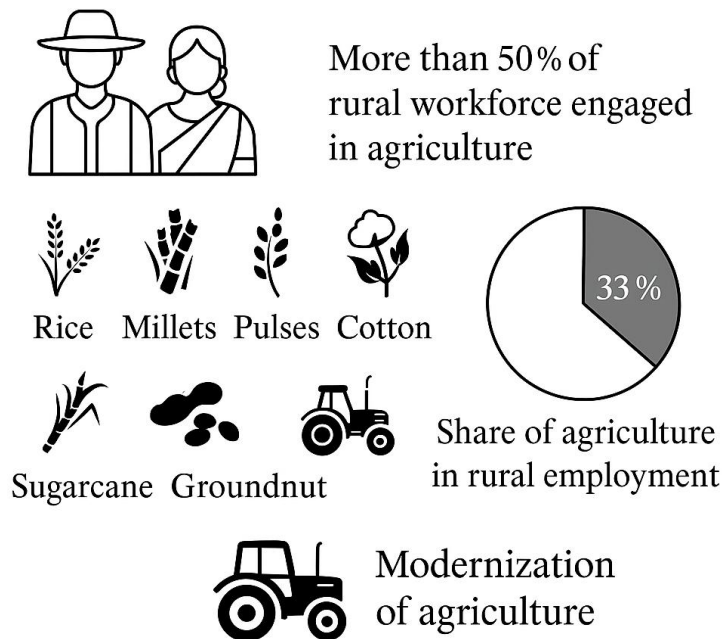


Figure 1: Agriculture in Tamil Nadu

## 1.2. The role of Agriculture in Tamil Nadu's economy

In addition to helping the region grow food, agriculture in Tamil Nadu ensures that many people find work and live without poverty. There have been important changes in agriculture, such as boosting productivity using different crop varieties, better irrigation, and the latest farm technologies. The advantages of higher yields have been lost because of

greater landlessness, greater use of machinery, and the challenge of climate change. As many people from rural areas migrate to cities, farmers are in short supply, leading them to become more involved in agricultural work. Based on Dhas (2012) research, the agricultural sector is important for understanding rural poverty in Tamil Nadu. Despite government programs, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), the

number of agricultural workers is steadily decreasing. Migrating men often take up jobs that require additional workers for seasonal tasks. Nonetheless, if male workers find jobs in cities, women often take over challenging agricultural jobs, resulting in an increase in the number of women in the sector.

### 1.3. The Pattern of Migration in Rural Regions

A mix of economic, social, and environmental factors affected migration trends in Tamil Nadu. Over the past few decades, more people have moved from the countryside to city areas because more work and better educational and health services are available in urban areas. The lack of job opportunities in rural areas, poor economic growth, farming failures caused by weather irregularities, and damaged land have encouraged people to leave. People move to urban areas because of the abundance of job opportunities in manufacturing, construction, and services.

Sundaravaradarajan et al. (2011) stated that a lack of regular jobs, little compensation, and tough financial situations inspired migrants to move out, whereas several people left because urban destinations offered more employment and better wages. Most of this change can be explained by the fact that men leave farm work to seek employment in cities, whereas women stay and handle farm work. Areas such as Tiruppur and Madurai have noticed this shift because male workers have migrated to other jobs, whereas women now oversee their farms.

Rural workers' economic weaknesses exacerbate this situation. Women who are usually responsible for farming find it difficult to obtain land, credit, or other farming tools. Owing to these barriers, it is difficult for women to participate in rewarding agricultural jobs, limiting them to difficult but low-paying tasks.

### 1.4. Economic and Social Outcomes of Migrations

Migration harms the agricultural sector in Tamil Nadu and has changed the social lives of rural people. Sundari and Mk (1998) revealed that there was an increase in the migration of women from Tamil Nadu to Delhi during certain times, especially because of droughts and economic difficulties. Such women, who usually work as domestic helpers, experience low pay and poor working conditions and have fewer ways to

receive social benefits. On the other hand, women who remain in countryside areas find that they have more agricultural duties because their migration caused an increase in the number of female farmers.

As agricultural work becomes feminized in Tamil Nadu, it affects the socioeconomic situation in rural areas in several ways. An increase in the number of women working in farming has changed the balance between men and women in this field. Women make most of their lives and farm management choices, yet they still struggle to obtain the land and other resources needed for productivity. Therefore, rural development strategies need to respond to gender issues in tasks such as farming and moving, as these help women deal with agricultural challenges.

Many farmers across Tamil Nadu are now women, mainly because of changes in their migration patterns. This is because men have traveled to urban areas in search of jobs, so women are now left in charge of farming. Most agricultural work in Tamil Nadu is done by women, which has led to socioeconomic problems, as they work hard and feed the family with little social and economic support. Critical policies must ensure gender equality for farmers, allow women access to the resources needed in agriculture, and support the growth of rural areas while caring for the environment. Promoting job growth and better living conditions in rural areas may prevent people from leaving their homes and boost the lives of rural residents.

## 2. Research Objective:

### 2.1. The effect of female labor in the agricultural sector in Tamil Nadu

This study aims to closely examine the growing number of female agricultural workers in Tamil Nadu due to migration. In recent decades, many people in rural areas have moved to cities, changing the structure of agricultural labor and bringing large changes to gender roles in Tamil Nadu's agricultural activities. In Tamil Nadu, men generally perform heavier agricultural jobs and make decisions, whereas women work on small tasks, such as planting, weeding, and post-harvesting (Sundaravaradarajan et al., 2011). As men often leave their villages for cities to seek work, the agricultural workforce is becoming increasingly

female. The departure of men for jobs outside farming causes more women to pick up on agricultural tasks. This review examines the following fundamental elements:

A. Impact of Men Migration on Agricultural Jobs: The departure of men from cities causes them to begin working in farming areas that men used to do.

B. This study examines the impact of migration-induced feminization on women by assessing their social and economic situations, authority in the household, and access to agricultural materials.

C. The results of the change in the gender ratio among farmers on productivity and sustainability in Tamil Nadu.

D. Barriers Encountered by Women in Agriculture: Gaining awareness of the obstacles that women face when they take on more responsibilities on farms, such as obtaining land, financial support, modern tools, and advice from others around them.

This review tries to explain the important impacts of feminization that is taking place in Tamil Nadu's workforce, while also examining its effects on society, culture, and laws.

## **2.2. Importance of the Study: Looking at How Migration Changes the Traditional Gender Patterns in the Field**

There is serious concern in Tamil Nadu about the rise of female farmers, as it touches on subjects related to gender equality, rural area development, and farming sustainability. One important aspect of this study is how migration helps to define the role of each gender in agricultural activities. This trend has led to important changes that have affected people, communities, and society as a whole. The following are important areas in which this study is particularly valuable.

### **2.2.1. Guiding Changes in Policies about Gender Equality in Agriculture**

As more people migrate from rural to urban areas, gender equality in agriculture is becoming both an opportunity and a challenge. Today, women are often in charge of farming and bringing in money through agribusiness, a role that they were not allowed to play before. Even in agriculture, women face many

challenges in achieving equal treatment. Difficulties such as lack of access to land, credit, and modern equipment prevent women from reaching their potential in agriculture (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

This review offers suggestions to policymakers regarding ways to tweak policies in favor of women, empowering them with the skills and tools to make decisions alongside men. If policymakers learn about the changes in gender roles in farming, they can create policies that help female farmers deal with their personal difficulties and work toward gender equality in agriculture (Sundari & Mk, 1998).

### **2.2.2. Effects on Rural Development and Sustainable Agriculture**

As more men work outside the area because of migration, women are now more involved in farming, which affects rural areas and the durability of agriculture in various ways. Participating in agricultural work gives women the opportunity to improve food security, strengthen their homes, and protect ancient farming skills (Dhas, 2012). Nevertheless, female farmers struggle to adopt sustainable procedures and develop economically because they do not receive sufficient training, aid with loans, or control over land. This review addresses how migration, which creates more women in rural areas, affects sustainability. This report examines how women working in agriculture help maintain sustainable rural areas in Tamil Nadu and the obstacles they face because of unresponsive agricultural policies and systems.

### **2.2.3. Women's families affected by social and economic influences**

On the one hand, becoming a farm worker could give women a chance to earn more and speak up on family decisions. However, it also allows them to face problems that they did not previously have. An increase in farm work often goes together with maintaining traditional family duties, increasing women's workloads, and worsening the situation. Examining how this affects women's lives helps establish ways to balance their work and family duties. This review focuses on changes in family life, the management of decisions inside the home, and the

general well-being of women as a result of their greater participation in agriculture (Sundari & Mk, 1998).

## 2.2.4. Migration and Gender Studies.

Most studies on migration have concentrated on men's migration, particularly its impact on the economy and society in rural areas. Nonetheless, this review further examines migration research by analyzing the rising

number of women in agriculture because of men leaving. This study attempts to address this issue by examining the effects of agricultural migration on both men and women. This study adds to the knowledge in migration studies and gender research by highlighting how migration leads to feminization in rural labor, farming, and gender roles (Figure 2).

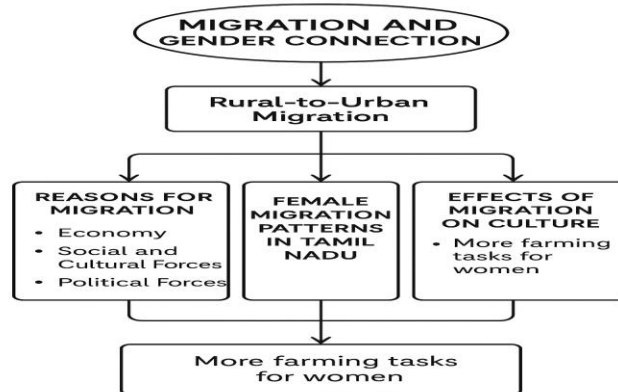


Figure 2: Migration and Gender Dynamics

## 2.2.5. Handling the Issues Surrounding Rural-Urban Migration and Differences in Jobs

Furthermore, because there are insufficient rural workers, this review examines how increasing the number of women in agriculture can address this issue. This study also examines the economic and social differences between urban and rural areas, focusing on agricultural labor and women's roles in rural areas. The study outcomes show new ways of reducing labor shortages in agriculture and making things easier for women who are now handling more farm work. This will make the labor force in Tamil Nadu's agricultural sector fair and environmentally sustainable. The outcomes of this study can benefit Tamil Nadu and other parts of the country facing the same problem of increased female migration. Examining how migration impacts gender roles in farms will allow this study to support plans and actions that help all genders, increase economic well-being in the countryside, and improve the long-term success of farming. In addition, this study will benefit discussions on migration,

gender, and rural growth by offering useful ideas for future research and policy.

## 3.Theories and concepts

This section examines various theories and terms that describe the rise in women's participation in agriculture. Some say that the aim is to discover how job roles for men and women are created, influenced by things such as migration, which has an effect on gender relations in Tamil Nadu's agricultural industry. To understand the changes in agricultural jobs, it is important to understand how gender roles in farming have changed and how they relate to migration. To analyze these changes, we used migration, labor, and gender theories, as well as the economic and social settings of each society.

Some jobs have become increasingly feminized over time.

Feminization of labor means that an increasing number of women are becoming involved in areas of the economy where they were not active before, mainly in agriculture, factories, and service industries. Many factors account for this shift, and migration is



one of the main reasons. In agriculture, feminization occurs when women are responsible for key jobs because men migrate to cities for economic reasons. Gupta notes that in Tamil Nadu, migration has greatly contributed to changes in the agricultural workforce because men go to the cities, leaving more opportunities for women to take part in farm work.

Feminization in Tamil Nadu's agriculture comprises certain main elements. The increase in the number of female farmers is a significant part of this development. Women who once only sowed, harvested, and processed food in the fields now look after the land, manage water, and handle other traditional male tasks, such as farming. Women now play the main roles in both manual and important management tasks in commercial agriculture, as well as in subsistence and small-scale farming. However, despite more women participating in the workforce, traditional male and female roles at home have not faded. Most of the time, men take on the tough jobs of plowing, while women end up doing the needed yet less important work of weeding, planting, and cleaning (Almeida, 2015). The increasing number of women in farming jobs has created inequality in the workplace. Even though many women work to help when men migrate, they must still cope with lower pay, unsuitable working environments, and lack access to important resources for farming, such as land, technology, and finances (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019). Women who work in Tamil Nadu's rural areas receive less money for working more hours and have little protection or other benefits than their male counterparts. In both official and informal economic information, women's major role in agriculture is often ignored or taken for granted. As a result, the feminization of labor involves more women becoming a part of agriculture, as well as discussions about fairness and promoting empowerment among farmers.

### 3.1. Theoretical Framework

Various sociological and economic theories explain how agriculture has changed in Tamil Nadu, leading women to assume more roles.

Structural functionalism assumes that society is stable when social roles are assigned to people according to

their gender. Men usually handle the most difficult and important farming jobs, whereas women's tasks do not receive much attention. From the perspective of structural functionalism, these roles fit together to preserve society's stability. However, when men working in farming move to cities, women often begin to take their place on the farm. According to structural functionalism, women undertake men's tasks in response to the demands of the job sector. However, these changes sometimes do not bring about true equality among different community members. While women take care of more duties, the system that makes them unequal remains in place, and they continue to miss opportunities to join the decision-making process in both farming and household work (Boserup, 1970). This theory points out that women tend to take on particular tasks in society, mainly because of what is expected of them by culture and economy. This theory explains that women are usually assigned jobs in agriculture that are overlooked or have low values. Unlike men, who tend to be managers and business owners and focus on large-scale farming, women are still assigned heavy, low-ranking, and always repeated farming jobs. The main reason for the feminization of agriculture in Tamil Nadu is this gendered division of work because it proves that women are doing more but are still caught up in old gender roles (Boserup, 1970). The capability approach was developed by Sen and Nussbaum and examines people's well-being through their possession of resources, opportunities, and freedoms. This perspective addresses the disadvantages that women endure, as they are not given enough resources to improve their work output. Although women work hard on farms, they commonly denied important resources such as land, money, technology, and knowledge. Insufficient resources reduce female farmers' capacities and hold back their chances for socioeconomic improvement. This means that the capability approach points out that policies should treat women fairly by improving their access to important resources and giving their agricultural work proper consideration and honor.

According to migration theory, migration patterns play a significant role in changing the rural labor market.

Men in Tamil Nadu migrated to the cities for other jobs, causing women to take over most of their agricultural work. The theory of migration states that people often migrate for more opportunities in life or for reasons such as poverty and the absence of work. When men move to cities in Tamil Nadu in search of higher-paying jobs, they are usually left to engage in agricultural work. Even though migration helps men financially, it puts more pressure on women, as they must handle household chores and tend towards the field. Because of this change, fewer men enter agricultural jobs, highlighting how migration influences the rise of female agricultural workers (Massey et al., 1993).

### **3.2. Gender Contribution to the Agricultural Sector**

In Tamil Nadu and other rural parts of India, the idea of gender roles in the labor market, especially in farming, is widespread. In the past, men carried out major and noticeable roles in agriculture, plowing fields, and managing land, but women helped with sowing, weed removal, and handling activities after the crop was grown. This idea came from society's belief that men should earn money, whereas women should take care of their families and work less. However, the new ways migrants move have changed the roles of these workers. As many men work in urban areas, women are now taking over jobs that once belonged to them. Owing to this transformation, farming in Tamil Nadu has become increasingly feminized, which has brought about a shift in gender roles among the people involved in these activities.

The aspects that define the feminization of agriculture in Tamil Nadu are as follows:

a. Due to the loss of male workers, women are now often responsible for agricultural livelihoods, such as handling crops, making decisions, and managing finances (Sundari & Mk, 1998). Simultaneously, women in agriculture must cope with significant issues, such as minimal land and financial resources. Due to these challenges, women have difficulty participating in agriculture and improving their financial status.

b. The common attitude is that a woman's role in farming is to assist by taking care of housework, cooking, cleaning, and looking after children. Although women now work more in agriculture, society tends to think of them first as homemakers, which keeps them busy with housework and family work (Almeida 2015).

c. Although women are the major workers in Tamil Nadu's agriculture, they are often paid less than men and must deal with poor work environments. Many women have to work long hours for less money and lack the right to help from the government or farmers. The higher pay given to men than women for agricultural labor shows that women are not appreciated enough for their work (Sundaravaradarajan et al. 2011).

d. Women's agricultural work is not generally recognized in Tamil Nadu, as most women do not own land or equipment for farming or have opportunities to make decisions about it. Being denied land and resources by culture, women's work in farming and agriculture has not received proper recognition in official narratives. There are many situations in which women do not have equal opportunities to raise their productivity or earn money (Vennila and Ramesh, 2019).

### **3.3. Migration and gender connection**

Rural-to-urban migration leads to important changes in gender roles, mainly in societies such as Tamil Nadu, which are based on agriculture. In addition to the economy, social, cultural, and political forces play a role in helping people migrate to cities. Over the past few decades, migration has caused women to perform more farming tasks than ever before. To understand how migration has affected agricultural work, one must examine the reasons for migration, female migration patterns in Tamil Nadu, and the effects of migration on culture.

#### **3.3.1. Forces Lead to Migration**

Many factors, known as push and pull, play major roles in migration. The factors that drive people out of their home regions are poor economic opportunities,

poverty, and lack of access to basic services, such as education, health, and employment. Farmers in rural Tamil Nadu face many problems, especially land damage, weather instability, and poor farming facilities, resulting in low production results. Consequently, many rural families are unable to meet ends, making living far from home tempting for many men. As farming does not provide reliable and sustainable financial support, male workers decide to leave rural areas and seek employment in cities where they can earn more (Sundaravaradarajan et al. 2011).

However, when we discuss pull factors, we refer to things that lure people from rural areas into cities. Rapid industrial growth in Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai in Tamil Nadu has given rise to many jobs, most of which are in the manufacturing, construction, and other service sectors. Every year, more rural residents move to these centers because they hope to earn more, have stable jobs, access better healthcare and schools, and live better (Sharma & Gopinath, 2019). In addition to other reasons, females are drawn to cities because they want more opportunities for learning and living and desire a way out of their usual rural lives. However, many societal norms limit women's chances of migration, leaving their migration habits separate from those of men.

### 3.3.2. Women's Migration Within Tamil Nadu

For a long time, female migration in Tamil Nadu was uncommon because of cultural rules that demanded that women look after the family and stay at home while men travel for work. Nevertheless, as time passed, more women moved, mainly because men were going to cities for work. Many women from Tamil Nadu have shifted to metro and urban areas to take up jobs in domestic work, the textile industry, and other small industries (Sundari and Mk, 1998). Many women move to other areas in Tamil Nadu because it is important for them to obtain jobs to feed their families and cover the gaps created by missing male relatives.

Many women from rural areas are attracted to informal jobs, especially at home, to serve upper and middle-

class urban families. This kind of migration allows women to earn higher salaries than rural farm jobs, but they still face poor working conditions, many hours of work, extremely low wages, and almost no social safety net. In comparison, the job systems for female migrants tend to double their exploitation, as they also have to take care of their household duties. In many cases, women who migrate to cities are unable to access education and medical facilities, are stigmatized by society, and have strict limits on their travel, which exposes them to abuse (Kavitha & Ramasamy, 2020). In recent years, the migration of women worldwide has had a major impact on both family structures and the local economy. When women work outside the home, family finances improve, and they tend to make fewer decisions alone. This trend can be noticed mostly in cases where female migrants are in charge of the family and take care of farming, whereas male family members are absent (Sundaravaradarajan et al., 2011). Since women are now earning and deciding more in their families, this signifies how society is changing in rural Tamil Nadu.

### 3.3.3. The Effects of Gender on Migration and Society

There are many cultural and social consequences for people migrating by gender to Tamil Nadu, India. When men leave their communities for work and stay away for years, women engage in agricultural work, which affects how families, communities, and roles within them are shaped. There has been a major change in the distribution of power among families. Farming activities are now being run by women who are not included in farming decision-making. Owing to this development, women have enjoyed greater independence and self-confidence than before. Today, women are required to do extra work as they are in charge of looking after the house and farm, which requires them to work hard in both areas (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

In contrast, cultural attitudes toward gender and migration still affect women's experiences. Although women sometimes manage jobs previously considered to be male, their efforts are often not acknowledged.



Most often, women's farming work is regarded as related to housekeeping, and they do not get paid or recognized for it as men do (Boserup, 1970). Moreover, women living in the countryside of Tamil Nadu may find it difficult to take on economic duties because of shunning and social pressure when breaking typical gender rules.

### 3.3.4. Agricultural Workforce

Women working in the agricultural sector in Tamil Nadu were significantly affected by regional migration patterns. Because many men find jobs in urban areas, women are now helping to support their families' farming activities in their communities. Changes in the way rural women work have had important effects on their economy, social lives, and mental health.

#### 3.3.4.1. Women's Role in Farming both Before and After Migration

Previously, women helped on farms in rural Tamil Nadu by sowing, managing weeds, and finishing crop processing. Nevertheless, when men migrate to work, women tend to assume major agricultural responsibilities. Today, women participate in household decisions, land care, and selecting crops to plant jobs that were mostly filled by men before. Over the years, women have shifted from secondary farming roles to primary roles by filling the positions of migrant men (Sundari & Mk, 1998).

This change in women's role in agriculture touches their responsibilities as well as their share in family budget decisions. Without a male family member, women are now in charge of planting crops and taking care of the family's farming finances. As a result, women have become economically stronger and have more choices; however, this can also cause problems. Although women contribute more to farming and bring in earnings for their families, they usually do not have sufficient resources such as land, loans, and support for technology; therefore, they cannot make the most of what they do (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

### 3.3.5. Economy, Society, and Mental Health

The feminization of Tamil Nadu's population has many economic, social, and psychological effects. Women who perform agricultural activities face more financial responsibilities and are more self-reliant on their families' finances and earnings. On the other hand, this change also brings economic problems, mostly due to the fact that women's farm work is not fully appreciated. Although women are important for the success of agriculture, they are usually unrecognized in official economic surveys and are excluded from owning land and obtaining credit, making it difficult for them to increase the productivity of their fields (Sundaravaradarajan et al., 2011).

Social aspects have changed because women play a larger role in agriculture. When women start earning more than their partners, they tend to have more power to make household decisions. The transformation of family structures can benefit women, yet it can cause disagreements since old gender roles do not always fit with the new family structures. Sometimes, women gain more independence; however, in numerous cases, they end up with more chores as they care for their families, farms, and children.

Handling work at home and in the field, without adequate assistance, often harms women's mental health. Troubles within the household budget in an all-female situation may lead to feelings of exhaustion and social isolation. Women may also be at greater risk because of their weak social support and fewer opportunities to benefit from important services, which worsens their mental health. Although some women can handle different responsibilities, others find it difficult to cope with work on farms and family tasks (Kavitha & Ramasamy, 2020).

### 4. The effects of migration in Tamil Nadu based on Socio- economic conditions

The socio-economic situation in rural Tamil Nadu is largely due to migration, given that agriculture has long been important to its residents. The choice to migrate to Tamil Nadu is influenced by many economic, social, and environmental factors that people and their families consider. Understanding the

categories of migration, economic reasons, and social elements helps explain the main trends that influence migration in the state, mainly from rural population movements to cities. During the last few decades, migration has mattered greatly to the state, as rural labor has moved to cities, and the internal movement of people has also been affected by larger economic and social changes.

## **4.1. Kinds of Migration**

### **4.1.1. Patterns of Moving from Rural Areas to Cities**

The migration of numerous people from villages to towns has changed the socioeconomic conditions of Tamil Nadu. In the last few decades, urbanization has accelerated owing to the attractive economic offers available in places such as Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Tiruppur. Owing to their promising work and better standards of living, cities have received large numbers of new arrivals from villages (Ramakrishnan and Sekar, 2016). Better economic prospects and a better way of life lead most migrants to seek new homes. Owing to the booming textile, manufacturing, and construction industries in Tamil Nadu, workers from underdeveloped and seasonally restricted agriculture-based villages are drawn to find jobs there.

The shift from rural to urban areas has changed the division of jobs. As many men go to cities for jobs, there is now a shortage of workers in rural farming. Women often undertake more agricultural work after male workers migrate (Sundaravaradarajan et al. 2011). Although the idea of a higher income in cities draws men to migrate, the women left behind usually take charge of all farm responsibilities and agriculture, although they often do not receive access to land, technology, or credit (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

The rising economic activity in big cities has driven some residents from the countryside to move there without job contracts or social security benefits. One can clearly see This phenomenon is evident when many rural women move to cities to work domestically. Having left for greater job security in

cities, men tend to find work in well-known businesses, whereas women turn to minor jobs for independent income because they can be more profitable than farming.

### **4.1.2. Migrations Within Tamil Nadu**

Internal migration among Tamil Nadu helped shape the state's migration pattern. Unlike when people leave rural areas for the city, internal migration in a state occurs when people move from places with farming or factory jobs. People in Tamil Nadu usually travel from less developed to more prosperous regions. For example, many people from less-economically developed districts in the south moved to urban industrial areas in Chennai and Coimbatore. As many districts, such as Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, and Ramanathapuram, depend mostly on farming and have weaker economies, many people from these areas have moved elsewhere in search of better jobs (Sundaravaradarajan et al., 2011).

Another reason for migration to Tamil Nadu was agricultural employment in rural areas. In certain cases, local people move from areas where the soil is infertile or where there are few water sources to places with better natural conditions. Laborers move to certain regions with higher agricultural needs only during the seasons when crops are grown in these regions. In this way, rural communities can survive changes in agricultural demand and find good job opportunities in places where manual labor is needed for farming (Sharma & Gopinath, 2019).

### **4.1.3. Factors that Drive People to Leave Their Homes**

The lack of well-paid jobs and the serious problem of poverty for many resources makes it difficult for most people in the region. The main reason for migration in Tamil Nadu is the ongoing economic divide and continuous poverty in many rural areas. People working in agriculture in regions affected by land loss, poor water systems, and sudden changes in weather usually receive low pay and short-term work. Many people, mainly men, have had to migrate to large cities in the hope of finding better and steadier jobs because

agriculture cannot provide adequate income. Economic inequality can also be found in rural areas, mostly between those with and without significant land use (Sundaravaradarajan et al. 2011). As many rural households in Tamil Nadu do not have access to modern farming methods and formal credit, they become poor and cannot farm efficiently. To survive, those trapped in poverty migrate elsewhere. People migrate to avoid poverty, while simultaneously increasing their families' earnings potential. When young workers migrate to cities for work, the money sent back to their families at home significantly boosts the rural economy (Sharma and Gopinath, 2019). Even so, this money often leads to family members splitting up, with women remaining to take care of farming while men use their salaries in cities.

#### **4.1.3.1. Climate Factors and Drought**

Environmental challenges, such as drought and climate change, have greatly contributed to the migration of Tamil Nadu. Weather during the monsoon season plays a major role in Tamil Nadu farming, and breaks in the monsoon season can result in terrible drops in farmers' production levels. Owing to climate change, the world is experiencing irregular weather conditions, record-breaking temperatures, and new rain patterns. Uneasing due to environmental stress is a major reason why farming communities in rural areas decide to migrate. As crops require different elements depending on the climate, people who rely on farming often have lower incomes. Consequently, many of these workers must leave the countryside and seek jobs that are not affected by the weather in urban communities (Ramakrishnan & Sekar, 2016). Because of environmental stress, people now rely more on other parts of the economy, so more people migrate to cities for work. There are cases in which migration becomes necessary because farming provides less reliable income; therefore, people seek work in cities where they can earn a steady salary.

#### **4.1.3.2. Social Factors**

Migration to Tamil Nadu is greatly influenced by issues such as caste, educational level, and income

level. For many years, people's opportunities to use resources have been affected by their castes in rural regions. People from lower castes often face problems when trying to buy land, obtain loans, and receive proper education. Consequently, many members of the lower castes are compelled to travel to other regions to find good opportunities (Sharma & Gopinath, 2019). Although education can create new opportunities for people, the lack of good schools in rural areas results in low-skilled people moving from Tamil Nadu to cities. They often end up doing low-paying work in the underground economy, where they can be mistreated and discriminated against (Vennila and Ramesh, 2019).

In addition, education significantly influenced migration patterns. The availability of education, especially for women, has caused more educated youth to migrate from Tamil Nadu. Many young people, especially those with easy access to schooling, move to cities to work in IT, healthcare, and education. Although education opens more doors for migrants, it has also been revealed that rural youth usually find it more challenging to learn and secure jobs than those from urban areas.

Differences in socioeconomic conditions had a major impact on migration from Tamil Nadu. Money and contact are common advantages enjoyed by richer rural families during migration, but less-privileged families usually face major challenges because of their poor financial situation and lack of social connections. Consequently, income gaps have expanded, and rural poverty continues to persist (Kavitha & Ramasamy, 2020).

### **5. The increase in women farmers due to male migration in Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu's agricultural workforce starting to include more females is a sign of changes the state's rural areas are experiencing. As men moved to cities hoping for new opportunities, there were significant changes in the way the agricultural sector operated in Tamil Nadu. As men are more likely to seek urban work, women end up doing roles that are not

traditionally theirs, causing a change in farming labor to be more female. Although gender shifts help to empower some women, they also lead to economic, societal, and psychological difficulties. Historical changes in women's jobs, difficulties faced by migrants, and steps taken by the government have revealed the transformation of Tamil Nadu's rural economic situation.

## 5.1. Historical Shift

Changes in Tamil Nadu's agricultural labor force, caused by people leaving cities, are just one part of a larger wave of changes occurring in rural areas, mainly due to male migration. Agricultural work in Tamil Nadu and rural India is often primarily performed by men. Commonly, men are responsible for labor-intensive work on the farm, such as tilling the land, organizing it, and deciding on crops. It was mainly women who supported the family by weeding, planting, and organizing the produce after it was ready. However, over the years, the migration of males to cities has made the traditional setup of jobs very different for men and women.

The major reason for this trend is that many rural males move to cities in search of better income, better places to live, and more urban employment opportunities. Sundaravaradarajan et al. (2011) claim that male workers from Tiruppur, Karur, and Madurai going to Chennai and Coimbatore for textile, construction, and manufacturing jobs has resulted in a lack of workers in farming. As there are insufficient workers in rural areas, more women have joined agriculture, giving rise to a new balance between male and female workers. Over time, women have been occupying jobs mainly held by men, leading to their role in farming.

This means that women now assume greater responsibilities in farming, which also affects how families are structured, since women contribute significantly to the household's social life and finances. Therefore, men moving to cities have played a major role in how gender roles have changed in Tamil Nadu's rural farming.

## 5.2. Problems arising from Women's Work

As more men migrate from rural areas, local women in Tamil Nadu now work more in agriculture. Consequently, there have been major changes in the role and status of women in farming societies. Women are expected to spend more time farming as a major result of migration-induced feminization. As men leave their homes, women are required to perform all housework and handle tasks that require strength on the farm. Consequently, women are tasked with handling numerous duties at home and work. According to Sundari and Mk (1998), women currently participate more in tasks, such as preparing land, working on irrigation, and handling small farms. However, their contributions are given little recognition, and they usually deal with factors such as unfair payments, resource problems, and being left out of decision-making.

In addition to doing work that requires more effort, women engage in growing expensive crops and small-scale farming. Because Tamil Nadu's agriculture has evolved, it is mainly women who farm organic vegetables and fruits that require special expertise. As part of the diversification of agriculture, many small farms are choosing more profitable crops for local and urban consumers instead of depending on rice. With the new economic opportunities introduced by this shift, women need more learning and tools; unfortunately, such things are often not within their reach (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

## 5.3. Female migrants problem

Although women's agricultural roles in Tamil Nadu provide them with a chance to earn income, this change also brings about many challenges. Therefore, discrimination and exploitation based on sex are urgent problems. Although women are doing more manual work in farming, they still face many obstacles that prevent them from earning better income. For example, women who farm usually earn less money and do not receive the same rights as men because they lack access to labor laws, such as minimum wage and social security (Sundaravaradarajan et al., 2011). In

addition to financial problems, women frequently experience social discrimination because their contribution to agriculture is often overlooked.

In addition, agricultural women in Tamil Nadu struggle with fewer resources and say how things are done. They are key to running the farming sector; however, women are seldom given authority over the land they farm, and it is difficult for them to obtain credit, training, or equipment (Sundari & Mk, 1998). As women do not have access to the resources they need, they cannot gain the full benefits of participating in farming and raising their economic status or profits. Although women help run farms in Tamil Nadu, traditional customs tend to restrict their involvement in important agricultural activities. Consequently, women require male family members to use land, decide on crops to grow, and invest financially.

#### 5.4. Policy Impact

New government efforts have been made to help women become increasingly involved in farming. To encourage rural women to join agriculture, the Indian government introduced MGNREGS in addition to a few other plans. Because of this initiative, women can now participate in agricultural and other rural projects. However, many women are not included equally because of their low pay, weak planning, and gender-related issues (Ramakrishnan & Sekar, 2016).

Apart from government efforts, women's self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives have boosted their influence in agriculture. These groups enable women to use government resources, finances, and training to participate in agriculture. Because of SHGs, women in rural areas can join together for savings, credit, and affordable investments in their farming businesses. Moreover, being part of the SHGs has allowed women to develop friendships and networks that help them work in agriculture. The participation of women in agricultural cooperatives has allowed them to act together, improve their positions in discussions, and join larger markets (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

However, these efforts have not been very successful for women because unequal power and barriers in

society prevent them from fully utilizing these resources. As an illustration, land ownership laws and farming technology still favor men, and many women find it difficult to participate in decisions within rural cooperatives and self-help groups because of patriarchy (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

#### 6. Case studies and evidence

It is easier to understand migration-based feminization in Tamil Nadu's farming sector by examining cases and empirical studies. A review of the experiences of Tamil Nadu women going from rural to urban areas and seeing rural agricultural workers fill jobs left by migrating men shows that migration has had both jobs and gender relations in the region. In addition, migration affects the crops grown, the types of jobs available, and changes occurring in the social and economic sectors of rural communities.

##### 6.1. Case studies about migration

Rural women from Tamil Nadu migrating to Delhi are considered major examples of feminization caused by migration. Men usually leave rural areas to find employment and live better in the cities. However, recently, many rural women in Tamil Nadu have begun to look for jobs in cities. Women in poor places, such as southern Tamil Nadu, move to large cities, such as Delhi, for jobs such as housekeepers, factory workers, or in small businesses. Women from rural areas in Tamil Nadu usually have to juggle money for their families while caring for their homes. Sundari and Mk (1998) studied the work experiences of female migrants from Tamil Nadu in Delhi's domestic service industry, and sent the money earned from these services to their homes. They usually endure poor working environments, long shifts, and low wages. They also face isolation from their social and cultural backgrounds, as they settle in cities that are dissimilar to the rural areas from which they come. However, people believe that migrants benefit financially and feel empowered, even though they are still mainly ignored at home and in city workplaces.

This movement greatly changed the lives of women who migrated and had a major impact on their



families. Since most work in urban areas pays more, more men go there, and women are left to handle rural farming activities. When men are not home to work, women in Tamil Nadu often need to go to other places to help with farming and gather the crucial labor required in certain parts during the main agricultural seasons (Ramakrishnan & Sekar, 2016).

## **6.2. Women working in rural areas as a result of men migrating to earn money**

Rural agricultural activities in Tamil Nadu are mainly performed by women because of the absence of males who have left for work elsewhere. As more men travel to cities for work, many women now look after their families' farmlands and carry out jobs that are often handled by men. This is mainly the case in Madurai, Tiruppur, and Karur, where migration by men is common. Earlier, women mostly engaged in tough chores, such as sowing and weeding, but now they often look after land management, irrigation, and managing the sale of their crop produce.

Nonetheless, these new opportunities for women in the industry face some difficulties. Although women are vital for farm work, they usually do not own land, credit, or modern farming tools, which makes it difficult for them to be productive and earn well (Sundari & Mk, 1998). Despite these issues, female farmers choose to cultivate high-value crops, such as vegetables, fruits, and organic plants, to meet the needs of those who buy them. As a result of migration, women's role in producing food and earning money has become the main focus of Tamil Nadu agriculture.

## **6.3. Investigations on the pattern of cropping and diversifying labor**

An increase in male migration has led to important changes in cropping practices in Tamil Nadu's farming sector. When men look for jobs in cities, women most often handle decision-making regarding crops and farming structures. A significant change is that many regions that farm only one type of crop are now growing more crop types. In places where many men move away from work, women often start growing

vegetables, flowers, and organic fruits in Tiruppur and Karur (Vennila and Ramesh 2019).

Trying different produce is linked to meeting demand and is also a plan to make more money from farming. Because there are not as many male workers on large farms, growing the right high-value crops gives women better results in their fields. However, these changes had some limitations. Women generally do not receive sufficient training and tools to succeed in these crops, and are usually backed by rules that give men more rights to land. For this reason, although women contribute significantly to farming when men are away, their chances of taking advantage of new growing opportunities can be slow because they face many obstacles created by society and its norms (Sundaravaradarajan et al. 2011).

## **6.4. The distribution of work among men and women in farming (such as paddy and cotton)**

Another important aspect of the feminization of agriculture in Tamil Nadu is the different ways in which women and men are responsible for farm work. Men living in places dominated by paddy farming are typically in charge of planting, providing water, and gathering crops. Nevertheless, as more men leave work, women must deal with these tasks more frequently. When cotton or groundnut is harvested, women perform the back-breaking activities of weeding and picking, which past generations have considered to be below men's jobs. More migrants from farms have made women responsible for their families' food in both staple and important crops, but their efforts are usually not acknowledged or well discussed (Sundari & Mk, 1998).

Having men and women work differently in farming reinforces society's views and leads to better results and more secure profits for farms. As men are unable to work, women take care of more land and try to grow new crops. As a result, the division of labor along gender lines stops women from having a say in all areas of farming and holding onto the resources and earnings they obtain from farming products.

## **6.5. Influence on Society and on the Economy**

Female migrants enjoy improvements in their socioeconomic situations.

Moving from rural to urban areas has played a key role in improving women's economic status. Many women employed in Indonesia's domestic labor, textile, and small manufacturing sectors have experienced a significant increase in their financial independence. In urban Delhi, Tamil Nadu's female domestic workers managed to send support and money home to their rural families, significantly improving their living conditions. Kavitha and Ramasamy (2020) find that rural Tamil Nadu families rely on women's migration to fight poverty because they depend on female remittances to enjoy better healthcare, education, and housing.

However, the advancement of female migrants in terms of their economic status has become a problem. It is common for women in lower-paying jobs to encounter abuse from their employers and harsh work situations. Although abandoning financial dependence is a key step in self-empowerment, women may still lack help from society and may be highly exposed to risks because their laws are not sufficiently strong. As women must manage their finances and feelings regarding migration alone while living in isolation in big cities, this combination can cause mood and health issues (Kavitha & Ramasamy, 2020).

## **6.6. Barriers in integrating rural and urban places and accessing educational and healthcare services**

Although female migration allows rural women to earn an independent living, it creates difficulties for female migrants in dealing with educational and healthcare issues in their new places. Most women living in cities come from poor families and usually suffer from a lack of housing, healthcare, legal support, and learning opportunities (Sharma & Gopinath, 2019). This is more difficult for those in the informal sector because women face discrimination, low pay, and have less access to social security or health insurance.

Men's migration from rural Tamil Nadu has led to a larger gap in women's access to education and health

care. Since women who stay in rural areas work in agriculture, they usually do not focus on their own education or health because their attention is on helping their families economically.

## **7. Relationship between migration, gender, and agricultural policy**

Given the increased migration and its effects on agriculture in Tamil Nadu, it is vital to consider how the government has addressed the changing role of women in this sector. Strategies that support gender equality, employ migrant women, and promote sustainability on farms are necessary to support Tamil Nadu's agricultural workforce as needs grow.

### **7.1. Support from the Government and Efforts for Equality between Genders**

In Tamil Nadu and throughout India, government policies have increasingly acknowledged the importance of women's contributions to farming. While agriculture is mainly dominated by men, women have traditionally been left in supporting positions, even though they help a lot. To address this problem, various initiatives have been introduced to improve women's access to resources, increase their farming status, and support financial growth. Improving women's participation in agriculture is the goal of the National Mission for the Empowerment of Women (NMEW) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Through MGNREGS, rural women often receive fair wages. Guaranteeing employment for at least 100 days each year provides women with economic opportunities so they can contribute more to agricultural and rural economies. Nevertheless, research has revealed that women working in MGNREGS programs are affected by social standards and discrimination, making them earn less money than men doing the same jobs (Sharma & Gopinath, 2019). To make a positive change, these policies ought to deal with the wage gap between genders, fair distribution of resources, and aid for female farmers who are starting to work in areas previously held by men.

The Women Farmers' Empowerment Program aims to provide women with more opportunities to buy land, borrow loans, and use farming technology. Women receive advice and support for their efforts in farm management and the development of new crops. Notwithstanding these policies, gender-oriented challenges in land ownership and money continue to prevent women from fully engaging in farming decisions and resource use (Vennila and Ramesh, 2019).

## **7.2. Education, Skills Training, and Financial Support Impact on Migrant Women**

Education, training, and financial aid are crucial for empowering female agricultural migrants. The government has launched more training courses to improve women's farming, business, and finance-handling abilities. In many cases, these training programs are combined with agricultural extension services to share information on modern farming, use different crops, and grow them sustainably. Organizations such as the National Agricultural Development Programme are helping women obtain fertilizers, seeds, and advanced irrigation technology, all of which boost their agricultural output. Women were able to grow their farms with the help of microfinance and financial assistance from self-help groups. Currently, rural women face significant challenges in receiving credit, indicating that they are financially excluded in many areas (Sharma & Gopinath, 2019).

Such programs are important for migrant women because of the many issues associated with their unofficial work in large cities. If migrant women are provided with an education that suits their needs, they can become more independent and play leadership roles in agriculture and the economy. Additionally, teaching migrant women about financial management and allowing them to use microcredit offers them more control over their finances and skills to invest in farming after leaving the city.

## **7.3. Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development**

Sustainable agriculture is important in Tamil Nadu to guarantee sufficient food, a healthy environment, and progress in rural areas. Over the years, the state has ensured that its policies support farming practices beneficial to the environment and farmers' yields. The National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) is working towards encouraging climate-smart farming and promoting organic and well-managed use of water. These programs are especially important in Tamil Nadu, where farming is affected by both climate change and a lack of water scarcity.

The 2008 policy for Tamil Nadu emphasized the use of environmentally friendly farming, growing healthy soil, and making better use of water resources. However, these policies can only be applied successfully if many male and female farmers receive appropriate education and training. Many female farmers have difficulty using sustainable farming methods and are usually not included in the decision-making process. Providing women with knowledge about sustainable farming helps agricultural policies consider the key roles of women in food production and rural work (Sundari & Mk, 1998).

The rural development policy in Tamil Nadu places great emphasis on expanding agriculture. Diversification recommends that farmers abandon building crops, such as rice or sugarcane, and choose to produce fruits, vegetables, flowers, livestock, and other aquatic products. Such a shift creates opportunities and difficulties for women working and participating in the labor market. Simultaneously, the expansion of agriculture allows women to participate in crop cultivation, which sells more. In Tiruppur and Coimbatore, many women in Tamil Nadu participate in vegetable, fruit, and flower cultivation because both domestic and foreign markets require them. This has resulted in women earning more money and contributing significantly to their families' finances.

Simultaneously, having access to different jobs creates difficulties, as women need to acquire new skills and obtain capital, technology, and access to new markets. Even as women participate in more types of farming, they encounter many challenges, mainly regarding

land use and making important decisions. Therefore, changes in agriculture should be combined with the support of female farmers to ensure equal access to benefits and assistance (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

## 7.4. Inclusion of Gender in Agricultural Planning

It is necessary to include gender mainstreaming in planning agricultural policies to ensure that women's needs and achievements are recognized. The process of including gender in rural development in Tamil Nadu is progressing slowly, but is now considered important. The government believes that policies that do not consider gender gaps in resource use do not ensure equality in farm development.

Gender-sensitive policies are necessary in agriculture to address inequalities that hinder women. For instance, allowing women to possess land and obtain loans and profits from different subsidies decreases the productivity gap between men and women. Self-Help Groups (SHG) in Tamil Nadu have helped women by giving them the chance to save, borrow, and learn new things in both agriculture and businesses. Tamil Nadu Rural Livelihoods Mission (TNRLM) has encouraged females to take part in farming by forming them into SHGs and giving them help with agricultural matters.

The government of Tamil Nadu has formed a Gender Action Plan that includes plans for including women in leadership roles, ensuring equal rights for men and women in extension work, and building women's groups in farming cooperation. Although these policies move things forward, it remains difficult to provide gender-specific programs to marginalized women and benefit them (Vennila & Ramesh, 2019).

## 8. Conclusion

The increase in male workers moving from the rural areas of Tamil Nadu to cities has caused women to undertake agricultural tasks previously managed by men. Consequently, women enjoy greater economic freedom and make more choices in agricultural areas, especially regarding switching from producing one crop to growing several crops. Despite these advances, women continue to struggle because they do not have

enough land, credit, or technology, and because they are still unjustly treated in relation to wages, working conditions, and decision-making. Such policies must provide resources to women, treat them equally in terms of pay, and develop agricultural policies based on their needs. Minimizing obstacles for women in rural areas can be achieved by strengthening their education, providing them with funding, improving their skills, and tackling policies that prevent women from gaining the benefits of new farming reforms. Future studies should examine the link between migration, gender, and employment in agriculture, mainly by examining how these factors affect women over a long period. In addition, conducting more case studies in communities and areas where women migrate can shed light on the problems they experience in the sector and help find ways to make them more involved and empowered in the sector.

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