



ASSERTIVE WIFE, COOPERATIVE HUSBAND: CHANGING HOUSEHOLD POWER STRUCTURE AND RETURNED MIGRANT WOMEN IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract This paper attempts to shed light on changes of power structure in the households of Sri Lankan migrant women who have returned from working in the Middle East as housemaids. It examines the changing power structure in relation to changes of tasks, responsibilities, decision-making roles, and gender relations in post-migration households. The changing power structure of post-migration households cannot be understood in isolation since it is an outcome of the entire migration process. This paper briefly addresses power relations in pre-migration households as well as during-migration households, in addition to post-migration households. The study reveals that the covert and manipulatory power of women, a characteristic of pre-migration households, changes to overt power or controlling power in post-migration households. This development results in the emergence of an active wife who plays an increasing role in public space, and a cooperative husband who accepts the private space of the household as his responsibility. The data for the study came from households of returned migrants who have worked in the Middle East for a considerable period with the minimum of a two-year stay. The methodology used in the study consisted mainly of anthropological fieldwork, supplemented by sociological data-collection techniques.

Keywords: Migrant women, Sri Lanka, power structure & migration, women's emancipation