

Mobility as a livelihood strategy: Challenges and Transformation of Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram, India

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how mobility as a livelihood strategy transformed the role and livelihoods of Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram, India. Through the use of feminist analytical lens, I presented the experiences and challenges of women migrant workers. Thus, I employed the theory of feminisation of labour migration, feminisation of poverty and work, and accordingly linked to the concepts of gender, mobility, livelihood, and remittances.

The research is conducted with feminist research techniques by interviewing Myanmar women migrant workers as respondents and other respondents who are familiar with Myanmar migrants. The findings reveal that mobility as a livelihood strategy has cause Myanmar women migrant workers to experience certain challenges and transformations upon their arrival and during their stay in Mizoram. It further shows that they are experiencing mobility in a different manner than men. The study also shows that due to their illegal mobility pattern, a large number of Myanmar women migrant workers are concentrated in the informal labour market, thus, are vulnerable and easily exploited.

The studied women also use remittances to contribute to the livelihood transformation of their families. These remittances are then used to invest in the education of their siblings/children or buy agricultural products to sell them in the local markets and generate income which contribute to maintaining their livelihoods. Thus, contributing to reducing the household poverty and enhancing local development. This study will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the causes and challenges of using mobility as a livelihood strategy for Myanmar women migrant workers.

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ABBREVIATIONS

FCI	Food Corporation of India
FIWDC	Ferrando Integrated Women's Development Centre
FRO	Foreign Registration Office
HREIB	Human Rights and Education Institute of Burma
INR	Indian Rupee (Currency)
LIFT	Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund
MHIP	Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl
MMK	Myanmar Kyat (Currency)
MZP	Mizo Zirlai Pawl
NEHU	North-Eastern Hill University
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NOK	Norwegian Krone (Currency)
SIB	Special Intelligence Bureau
SSM	Samaritan Society of Mizoram
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WLC	Women League of Chinland
YMA	Young Mizo Association

1 INTRODUCTION

The conceptualisation of how gender and mobility influence each other has been an ongoing discussion since the beginning of out-migration during the 90s. Though migration is known to be dominated by men, about half of the world's migrant population are women (The World Bank 2006). This shows that the number of women migrating for work is increasing as it provides them opportunities to find better jobs to sustain their livelihood. Thus, the pattern of migration and discourses, experiences, expectations, and responsibilities of the migrants are gendered, that is to say, that women and men engage in migrations and mobility differently (Morokvasic 2014, 355). However, migration theory emphasised more on the causes of women's migration, and it unintentionally failed to address the gender-specific migration experiences that follow suits (Boyd and Grieco 2003). In particular, the challenges faced by women migrant workers in their destination country is also compounded by the fact that they are women and migrants.

The impact migration and mobility have on gender, social and livelihoods transformation is a challenging and a prominent topic. It has been studied by well-known researchers such as Tanu Priya Uteng, Tim Cresswell, Ragnhild Lund and Bernadette Ressurreccion. Since women's mobility and their motivation to migrate for better livelihoods are gendered, men and women also have distinctive experiences when arriving in destination countries as women tend to lack access to information, working conditions and are more vulnerable to exploitation. Migration and mobility provide opportunities for women to provide for their families, for autonomous power within the household and community, simultaneously empowers them by allowing them to access to employment and become the breadwinner of the family. Hence, mobility can contribute to positive effects such as individual empowerment and a better livelihood for both the migrant and their families. On the other hand, it can also exaggerate the vulnerabilities that accompany for women migrant workers such as physical and mental abuse, exploitation at work and in harsh case, human trafficking.

Women in Myanmar¹ are increasingly migrating to neighbouring states, countries or other urban areas where there are increasing demands for cheap and low-skilled labour to enhance their economic opportunities as well to better their livelihood quality. Furthermore, the accelerated

¹ Also, previously known as Burma. I have chosen to hereby refer the people of Myanmar as Myanmarese.

economic growth in Myanmar also contributes to the increasing number of people to be able to afford long-distance migration, thus leading to a greater variation of migration flows in connection with destination and skill composition (IOM 2016). Nevertheless, since the socio-economic conditions between migrant households vary in Myanmar, there are also migrants who are unable to afford the cost of migration and have to utilise other methods to enter destination countries in order to sustain their livelihood. On that account, hundreds of people from Myanmar are crossing the border of neighbouring countries like India or Thailand through an *'illegal'* or *'legal'* channel on a daily basis by various ways of transportation through cross-border migration at a high frequency. According to the Myanmar Department of Population (2015), about 53 percent of the people who have migrated were women. It further shows that about 0.9 million people of the Myanmarese population migrated to India and this suggests that it is due to the increased and improved infrastructures that contribute to the vast flow of mobility (Department of Population 2015, 41). The complexity of labour mobility within and across Myanmar's cross-border is a significant feature of Myanmar society. Many of these migrants were pushed by structural forces such as limited livelihoods, poor socio-economic conditions, and insecurity resulting from long-term armed conflict (IOM 2016).

Most women migrant workers in rural Asia have to contend with the cross-border entry because of the social constraints, gender discrimination and various forms of exploitation in destination and origin countries (ILO 1998). The essence of gender in mobility has been questioned by feminist scholars about the representativeness of men in migration movement as a young, economically motivated male, and the invisibility of women in the diversified migration movement. Therefore, it is important to stress the importance of gender in migration research, as well in policy making (Piper (2003), in Morokvasic (2014, 356)). However, through their mobility, women are capable of changing their social and livelihood transformations which are attained via remittances in the origin country. Withal, the temporary or permanent cross-border movement of people from Myanmar to Mizoram, India characterised the main mobility pattern of a rural household for social reasons such as employment, services, goods, and education, and thus, linked and complemented the permanent flows of mobility (Steel and van Lindert 2017, 6). In addition, migrant workers are not only motivated but are affected by the changing political and economic factors. As remittances also become a major source of income for the household in Myanmar that contribute to a better quality of livelihood transformation, it is, therefore, crucial for these women to take major decisions in becoming the breadwinner of the family (Steel and van Lindert 2017, 6). The remittances that are sent to their families are used

to buy various commodities or are invested in other commercial enterprises that can sustain their living quality in their home country.

Though migration is assumed to be dominated by a young, economically motivated male population over the centuries, women have outnumbered these males dominated migration streams. As such Myanmar women's mobility in bettering their quality of life through migrating to neighbouring countries like India, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, etc. have increased tremendously. Besides, the role that their mobility and gender plays in transforming their livelihoods is neglected due to the socially constructed gender roles that are embedded in the cultural and traditional aspect and is often seen as a given. Since Myanmar women's contribution to their changing livelihood and their gender roles through the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy is often overlooked, it is important to study and understand how their mobility is motivated, the challenges they encountered and the impact it has on their gender roles. Accordingly, it is also necessary to understand and focus on how gender roles play a crucial role in the social process of their mobility (Pedraza 1991, 303).

1.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to contribute to a better understanding of how mobility as a livelihood strategy helps transformed the role and livelihoods of Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram, India. It is intended that the research findings will aid in future research regarding the gendered aspects of migration for Myanmar women migrant workers in India as there are hardly any studies executed in India whereas a fair amount of research on Myanmar migrant workers is done in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. Also, this research might plausibly work as a mechanism for the framework in the construction of policies to safeguard and promote women's active mobility and participation in the economic development of Myanmar. The research also intends to explore the motivation behind Myanmar women's mobility at a micro (individual), meso (collective/social network) and macro (nation's/global) level. Thus, the main research question is as follow:

“How has mobility transformed the role and livelihoods of Myanmar female migrant workers in Mizoram, India?”

As the research question is to study the mobility of Myanmar women migrant workers, it raises some core questions and sub-objectives:

- To identify the challenges and contribution of female's mobility: This objective raises questions about how poverty and socio-economic conditions play an important decisive role in their decision to migrate, what are the channels of mobility, and what are the types of work undertaken by Myanmar women migrant workers during their stay in Mizoram.
- To explore how the move to India has transformed the livelihoods of Myanmar women migrants at different scales (micro, meso, and macro levels): This objective raises questions about what ways has mobility impact Myanmar women's migrant workers role in Mizoram upon arrival and during their stay, and the role of remittances.

The research is based on literature review, qualitative semi-structured interviews with women and prominent local non-government organisation (NGO)'s leaders from Aizawl, a district of Mizoram. As the research is grounded in feminist theories, it will seek to meet the objectives by solving the research question.

1.2 Significance of the study

Since Myanmar is in the process of political and economic reform, privatisation of state-owned companies has impacted the economy and the labour market where 37 percent of the country's population is still unemployed and an average of 26 percent are still living in poverty (Maierbrugger 2013). And as a part of an economic reform in Myanmar, trade between borders are open to other neighbouring countries, and flow of labour between neighbouring countries are receptive. Though the studies of Myanmar migrants are carried out, most of the studies are primarily focused in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, and hardly in India. These migration studies are dominated by the experiences and contributions of male migrant workers whereas the experiences of women migrant workers are often marginalised. Moreover, the subject of Myanmar women migrant workers, the experiences, and challenges they faced during their migration and how they are important actors in bettering livelihood is often disregarded. Therefore, it is crucial to understand why mobility is undertaken as a livelihood strategy by women, if their decisions are taken individually, by collective household decision or if they are impacted the recent political and economic reforms of Myanmar.

The results obtained in this research may differ from other earlier projects, or researches undertaken in Thailand or other neighbouring countries. It is important to understand the experiences and challenges of mobile livelihood undertaken by women migrant workers in Mizoram, India. This research will hopefully provide information on how and why women migrant workers are concentrated in the informal labour market, and how they contribute to the changing livelihood of their families.

1.3 Structure

This study has been sectioned into seven chapters. The overall research question, core-questions and sub-objectives, along with the significance of the study and structure of the thesis is presented in chapter one. Ensuing the introduction in chapter one, chapter two will present the research methodology used in this thesis and justifies why the particular methodology is chosen in detail. It also discusses how data is collected and analysed, how the respondents are selected and the limitations of the study, and ethical considerations. Thereafter, chapter three introduces the contextual background for the study area, Mizoram and a background of gender and mobility in Myanmar and the study area Mizoram will follow. Subsequently, chapter four will cover the theoretical and analytical framework which introduces the theoretical framework and focuses on existing studies on gender and mobility in general. In this chapter, the feminisation of labour migration is discussed from previous studies and how mobility is gendered, remittances and the livelihood transformation that women's mobility has generated, as well clarifies the key concepts gender, mobility, and livelihood. Moreover, this chapter will also present how I develop the analytical framework to present my understanding of the theories and how I position myself within the theories.

The next chapter will present the findings in relevance to the theoretical and analytical framework discussed in chapter four. This will be followed subsequently by chapter six which discusses the findings in regard to the research questions, core-and sub-objectives. Finally, the thesis concludes with chapter seven where the findings and discussions are summarised in regard to the research purposes and objectives.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research has been purposefully driven to contribute to a better understanding of how women's mobility as a livelihood strategy helps transformed the role and livelihoods of Myanmar women migrant workers. As the aim of the research is to explore the challenges and contributions of Myanmar women's mobility and give their lived realities and experiences more meaning and the reader more in-depth understanding. In order to understand the intertwined relationship between the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy by women and the role of women migrants play in achieving and maintaining their livelihood, I have to generate data that could contribute to the understanding of why the influx of Myanmar women in India for work is increasing in comparison to that of Myanmar men, learn their lived experience, explain and understand their perspective of the situation. For this research, it is, therefore, befitting to employ a qualitative approach as the primary data will be collected through qualitative methods with semi-structured interviews. Moreover, since the thesis will explore women's mobility and their lived experiences, engaging it with a feminist perspective will contribute to identifying the various challenges they faced through the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy and give a deeper understanding of their contributions to the shift of socio-economic conditions at a micro, meso and macro level.

With the use of feminist methodology, it will not only seek to explore the experiences of Myanmar women and their mobility but also enable to explore the impact of mobility on their livelihoods. Therefore, I have chosen to use qualitative feminist research methodology to create an in-depth understanding and answer my research question and the core objectives. Not to mention that as a Myanmar woman migrant myself, this thesis was a way to articulate what I see and knew of the experiences of other migrants as a refugee or economic migrants. It is also a way of finding a voice for my '*younger*' self and those marginalised groups of the society, especially Myanmar women with a rural background. Though the circumstances of Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram, India has changed drastically in the past decade for the better, their status as women migrant workers are still undermining their everyday roles and are still subjected to work exploitation through low wage and long working hours. This chapter will explain how the research fieldwork was conducted, justify the techniques use and strategies of the research.

In this chapter, I will first discuss and explain how feminist research methodology was employed in this research, subsequently followed by how I used the methods and techniques to gather the primary data such as interviews (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, 11). In addition, I will also describe how the respondents were selected which followed by the data analysis process of the gathered data in a new section. I will also discuss the scope and limitations ensued during the research. Furthermore, I will also further explain why the gathered data is not a representative for Myanmar migrant workers and lastly, justify the validity and reliability of the research.

2.1 Feminist research methodology

The purpose of qualitative research methodology is to explore and understand the underlying issues embedded in the socio-economic relations, for instance, the mobility pattern of Myanmar women migrant workers, how their decisions to migrate is affected by their gender and the impact it has on their livelihoods, in other words, their everyday life experiences during their stay in Mizoram. Therefore, qualitative research methodology is vital in addressing the everyday social multiple realities of migrant workers in destination countries and provides an insight in how women use mobility as a livelihood strategy and how they contribute to the changing gender roles in their origin countries.

Moreover, by employing a feminist perspective in this study, it will also illuminate the experiences of the women's respondents with differing roles, and also giving voice to those marginalised, silent and unheard voices. Argued by Ann Oakley (1998) in "*Gender, Methodology and People's Ways of Knowing: Some Problems with Feminism and the Paradigm Debate in Social Science*", methodology is gendered as the research techniques used in methodology offer an explanation to the relation between the social and scientific division of labour, the cultural production of masculinities and femininities, and the processes used to establish an understanding of the social and material world. According to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), a feminist research methodology is "*a set of approaches to the problems of producing justifiable knowledge of gender relations*" (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, 10). Hesse-Biber (2014b) also stresses that feminist research methodology seeks to study and address the social inequities and injustices that undermine women's lives experiences (Hesse-Biber 2014b, 5). Since the intention of the study was to explore the lives of the women in focus, it was crucial that their everyday lives and experiences are represented in their own words, however, through the use of my own lens. By doing so, it will contribute to unravelling the

respondent's experiences upon their arrival and during their stay in Mizoram and look into how they create and make meanings to their mobility.

Therefore, the research methodology in this study is qualitative in nature where feminist research procedures and techniques are used, for instance, a face to face semi-structured interview with the respondents which capture the subjects view on a particular topic so that the researcher will understand the complex world of the respondent (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, 1). Regardless of the choice of methodology, methodology in social research is concerned with the validity of knowledge produce and authority and is still a disputed topic (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, 6). Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, intro) stress that by using a feminist research methodology, feminist researchers are enabled in telling better stories of the underlying gendered social realities than others. Not only that, Wickramasinghe (2010) also stresses that by using feminist research methodology knowledge is create or '*make meaning*' (Wickramasinghe 2010, 4,6). So, in order to explore and understand how gender and mobility are intertwined or how mobility is affected by gender, it is advantageous to use feminist research methodology so that the social realities and experiences of Myanmarese female migrant workers in Mizoram, India are fathomed. Moreover, subjectivity is importantly stressed within feminist research methodology as it portrays the consciousness of the self as a woman and as an agent of self-determination for their own and families livelihood transformation (Wickramasinghe 2010, 34, and De Mel 1994).

2.2 Data collection

This research is a qualitative study and is conducted in Mizoram, India focusing on Aizawl district. In this section, I will describe the procedure I employed to collect the data for this study. As the data was collected through the use of primary and secondary sources, it is fitting that the methods employed in this study are divided into subsections.

2.2.1 Primary data

In this study, the primary data are retrieved through qualitative semi-structured interviews with an interview guide which followed a clear set of instructions and was followed during the interview as it was the most suitable in generating detailed information of the research topic. The purpose of having an interview guide during an interview is to help the researcher to direct the conversation towards the topic relevant to gender, mobility and livelihood transformation

as interviews with the respondents can get side-tracked during an interview. And by following a predefined interview guide, it attempts to overcome the weaknesses of qualitative feminist methodology approach.

Interview

An interview is a commonly used data collection technique by feminist researchers. Not only does it contribute to collecting high quality of data, it also contributes to creating an opportunity for the researcher to get develop a relationship with the respondent. Through the interview, women are not only seen as subjects but also as pertinent contributors and as a researcher with feminist standpoint, it is essential for me to gain a new insight on their hidden and unarticulated knowledge, the realities and experiences of their lives and the way they perceive the world. It is also important to emphasise that it is the women migrant workers own voices and experiences that form the basis in this analysis. The interviews were conducted at various places; the church, relative's house, their own home or at their workplace. Though preferable to do the interview in a private and safe place, it was at times impossible to do so as there was no private space in the church or in their workplace. When possible, the interview takes place within a 'room' separated by thin plywood wall and open roofs. Though not private as anticipated, it was at the least a discreet interview which was conducted mostly during Sundays.

During a qualitative interview, the focus of a feminist researcher is to uncover knowledge that is subdued by the respondent which often are the social realities (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 184). Moreover, in this field study, I have decided to use a semi-structured form of an interview with the respondents. By incorporating this type of interview, it was more or less flexible to follow up on comments and clearing up the inconsistencies in gathered data as a semi-structured interview ask more open-ended questions which allows for a discussion between the researcher and the respondents. Further, a semi-structured interview is structured to uncover and explore issues that are subjugated and encourage the respondents to express their feelings and experiences. It is also important to emphasise that open-ended questions in an interview allow the respondents to elaborate and explain their responses.

The goal of utilising interview as a data collection technique is to achieve a deeper understanding of the individual experience of the respondent. It also enables the researcher to generalise their findings to a wider population (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 185). Furthermore, the researcher is also responsible to explain the questions asked during an interview in a different

manner, if the respondents are unable to understand the initial questions which should be designed as neutral, non-offensive and clear. However, the answers of the respondents will not be as generalising to the wider population in this study, nonetheless, it can provide a crucial explanation for the experiences of the community. Most of the questions are sensitive and hard to talk about as it requires a detailed explanation of their childhood and family situations. Therefore, my local advisor suggested developing the questions that can be more easily understood and easy to answer.

Though the interview guide was constructed for a semi-structured interview, some answers overlap each other and thus, had to resort to the interview guide to be able to stay on track with the interview to gather data and clear the inconsistencies. The questions in the interview guide are meant to function as a means to make the respondent correspond, which also means that there is no prefixed plan of how the interview should advance. The interview guide was directed to reveal and understand the women's experience of using mobility as a livelihood strategy, the challenges they faced when partaking in the gendered labour market and how it has contributed to transforming their livelihoods. Moreover, the questionnaires in the interview guide contribute to identifying key issues from the respondents and also inquire about their own feelings and thoughts on becoming strong, and independent woman and on their exploitation in the labour market.

2.2.2 Secondary data

On the other hand, the secondary sources are mostly based on articles, academic books, blogs, and news articles. The research question was developed during my first year as a master student and also because of my great interest in the gender-related issues. Nonetheless, the theoretical findings are mostly based on previous research on South-East Asian countries. Wickramasinghe (2010) also emphasises that using secondary sources is a subjective process of producing knowledge as it is mostly based on the selective reading and understanding on the researcher's subjectivity and the standpoint of the moment (Wickramasinghe 2010, 112).

2.2.3 Selection of respondents

In order to conduct an interview, researchers need to have the right respondents as they are an essential component of a research and acquire the reliable information (Munday 2014). Seeing that my research was about gender and mobility, hence, the respondents were purposively

selected from the Myanmar population in Mizoram. Thus, the criteria for the respondents were to be mobile women migrants from Myanmar, employed and have been residing in Mizoram, mainly in Aizawl district. With a total of 16 respondents, I acquired access to 14 women respondents between the age of 18-60 years whereas the two respondents were men between the age of 40-50 years. The respondents came from a different range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds where the majority of the respondents were from the Tedim township in Myanmar. One of the criteria was for finding respondent was working women migrants. However, I did not specify if the women should be employed in the formal or informal sector or when the respondents came to Mizoram as the research study intends to study how women used mobility as a livelihood strategy. Consequently, the respondents have different occupations such as working in the quarries as rock splitters, housemaids, handloom weavers, au pair combined with housemaids, leaders project manager, and director.

As mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted in various street spots in Aizawl district, where a majority of the respondents were working and living. In qualitative methods, it is crucial to determine who should be asked or eligible to participate in a research. This is so because it will be impossible to find respondents who have experienced the phenomenon under study, thus, hindering in gaining a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon without some clear criteria. The selection of these respondents was out of convenience, that is by recruiting respondents from where they were easily accessible, for instance, through the Church (Miner and Jayaratne 2014, 316). As Miner and Jayaratne (2014) opined, most of the selection of respondents also happen through a snowballing sampling technique where the respondents invited their acquaintances to join or where I was referred to by my local gatekeepers. The local respondents acted as my local gatekeepers who introduced me to other Myanmar migrant workers that they had worked with previously in their research.

Snowballing sampling is a technique used to find respondents where the researcher first established a contact with a respondent and request the initial contact to identify more respondents (Noy 2008, 330). In this kind of sampling, the researcher controls the sample size according to the requirement of the research (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 192). During the initial contact with a respondent, the respondent was informed of the conditions for participating who in turn informed the other contacts, thus, giving me the opportunity to accessed to other new respondents in the community (Atkinson and Flint 2003).

By meeting Church leaders and other local gatekeepers, I was able to inform them about my study and purpose of the research study. They were all very cooperative in finding and introducing me to women migrant respondents in Aizawl, and other relevant respondents for the study. Through my local gatekeepers, I had the opportunity to ask them for an appointment for a detailed interview. There are certain advantages and disadvantages when using this method where the advantages can be reaching the invisible or concealed populations and contribute to a cost-effective way of collecting primary data (Noy 2008, 330). On the other hand, snowball sampling can be biased as initial contacts provide other contacts within their social circle which cannot guarantee a representativeness of samples (Atkinson and Flint 2003).

Table 1 List of respondents with a pseudonym.

NAME	GENDER	AGE	STATUS	EDUCATION	Year of Arrival
ZAI	F	43	MARRIED	DROPOUT	2003, 2004
KIMI	F	38	WIDOW	MIDDLE SCHOOL	2000
THATHA	F	18	SINGLE	PRIMARY SCHOOL	2015
SUITE	F	21	SINGLE	MIDDLE SCHOOL	2007-08
SIANNU	F	19	SINGLE	PRIMARY SCHOOL	2013-14
SANGI/CICIN	F	21	SINGLE	MIDDLE SCHOOL	2013
MUANI	F	38	MARRIED	DROPOUT	2004-05
MANGI	F	35	DIVORCE	DROPOUT	2004-05
LIANI	F	55	SINGLE	NA	NA
MAWITE	F	NA	SINGLE	NA	Local
TLUANGA	M	NA	MARRIED	NA	Local
PI NUNI	F	60	NA	NA	NA
PU LAMA	M	45	MARRIED	NA	NA
NUNUI	F	NA	DIVORCE	MIDDLE SCHOOL	1999, 2000
THEIN THEIN	F	35	MARRIED	NA	NA
SUII	F	31	MARRIED	MIDDLE SCHOOL	2002, 2005

2.3 Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative data analysis is to interpret the data collected and facilitate an understanding of the studied phenomenology through keeping a memo and transcribed interviews (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 223). She also asserts that through the process of transcribing, the researcher can become closer to data and further provides the possibility to critique and improve the interview process (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 397). Furthermore, in order to determine the outcome of the research, it is crucial that the data coding should be started right after each session during the research process. Pope, Ziebland, and Mays (2000) also argue that the data analysis process is an essential component while doing research as it will analyse key themes

within the data collected and help seek to reduce the vast information obtain from the respondents (Pope, Ziebland, and Mays 2000, 114).

The information obtained from the interviews were recorded after their consent, notes were taken in between and were transcribed immediately after each session. The information was then typed and stored in my personal digital notebook. By using an audio recorder, it was much easier to clarify phrases that were hard to understand during the interview, thus contributing to the coding process. The research questions function in identifying the analytical framework when the raw data was coded by using descriptive codes to categorise the gendered dimensions of mobility, poverty, work, and how remittances are used to transform their livelihoods. For instance, I used descriptive codes such as roles of MWMWs² in Mizoram, informal labour sector, challenges, remittances, wage, etc.

Figure 1 An excerpt from actual data showing how I analyse and categorise the collected data with descriptive codes.

The image shows a text excerpt with several handwritten annotations in red, purple, and green ink. The text is underlined in red and green. The annotations include: 'Social connections' in red, 'Illegal channel' in red, 'informal work' in purple, 'challenges of migrants women' in green, and 'cyclical desperation - livelihood' in purple. The text excerpt is: "This time I entered the country with the help of a friend and got an assistance in crossing the cross-border. This time I worked as a housemaid for a month but got sick for another month. Thereby, I choose to work again in the quarry as a rock splitter and stayed here. During this time, there was conflicts between Burmese and local Mizo's, so we were caught and sent to prison. The local police dropped use off at the Tiau border, and we went on crossing the border. This is my 4th time coming to Mizoram for work."

With the use of descriptive coding, I was able to sort the data into the analytical category it belongs to in a basic manner, and after that, the sorted data were then linked together again. Since I started out with some pre-set codes which derived directly from the research question and objectives such as channels of mobility, types of work, livelihood transformation which was then sorted again into the micro, meso and macro level. Hence, having pre-set codes contributed to the categorisation of the raw data. Also, there was some commonality between the respondents in how they help contribute to the transformation of livelihoods in origin country through how remittances are sent and use. Moreover, the impact their mobility has on

² Myanmar women migrant workers.

their gender roles in social and cultural settings both in origin and destination countries are also a recurrent topic that constantly was visible during the coding process.

The process of data coding did not go according to the prior planned in regard to expected time. As Pope, Ziebland, and Mays (2000) stresses transcribing data are not necessarily small data and time consuming, thus, it took a long time than expected to go through every sentence in the interview which is a crucial component of the data (Pope, Ziebland, and Mays 2000, 114). On the contrary, the analysis process was not as smooth as expected while analysing some of the first four interviews during my stay in field site as I found out that most of the questions in the interview guide were apparently not working in meeting the research question and objectives. This can be accounted on the rigid questions which can be hard to understand. Although I tried to follow the advice of the local professor, it took some explanation and self-introduction of my own personal struggle as a Myanmarese refugee migrant for the respondents to open up and be clearer of their answers.

2.4 Limitations

The thesis rests mostly on primary data collected during the fieldwork in Mizoram, India and in secondary data from scholarly articles, literature reviews and reliable databases since the data generated were not as anticipated. Moreover, many of the respondents were not responsive as during the interview, thus, I had to navigate the questions from the interview guide on the basis of their responses. That is to say, in order for the respondents to be open and direct about their living conditions, I had to break some questions from interview guide into more simple and uncomplicated words. And as a feedback from a local professor from North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), instead of asking questions like “*Do you feel more empower with you supporting your family or earning on own?*”, I had to break this question by asking, “*Do you feel more strong or independent as a woman?*” or “*Do you feel like you can do much more than before?*”. However, during the interview process, many of the respondents were unable to understand the simpler question, thus, I had to share my own personal background and how I feel more empowered and independent when I am achieving my own goals. In this way, the respondents were able to be more open and more understanding of the questions asked.

Moreover, during the fieldwork, I had the complications of time issues and was not anticipating it. There was a lot of going back and forth to the Foreign Registration Office (FRO) and the

Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB). Moreover, things did not go as planned. As a student researcher, I was restricted to cross Indo-Burma border or travel to other districts without the prior approval of the local authorities. This limited the study area as the study area become concentrated into one district and does not generalise the situations of other Myanmarese women working in other districts of Mizoram. In addition, my intention of travelling into Myanmar to do a follow-up on the respondent's family was not accomplish due to the certain restrictions. Consequently, I was unable to collect data for one of the core objectives in the research question which is, "*How has increased mobility reinforced the shift of socio-cultural and economic development in Myanmar?*". Subsequently, my supervisor and I agreed to dismiss the questions and altered my research questions and objectives to suit my findings after our counselling session.

As most of the respondents have employers and were working in allotted working hours, and a small amount of free time during Sundays, it was hard for both me and the respondents to meet up. In order to be able to interview a respondent, I had the luxury of travelling about 4 hours to reach the respondents by public transport which can be quite demanding, however, enlightening. During such time, the possibility of meeting a respondent became less likely. Moreover, many of the respondents have validated that their conditions with their employers have become a lot better after Myanmar attaining democracy and further added that there are certain local NGO's that are working to help women labour/economic migrants in general. Despite the various limitations, I was able to have about 16 respondents in total with 2 male respondents ratio of 14:2 where the majority were women.

2.5 Validity

The key aspect of qualitative research methodology is addressing the validity of the research findings as it can assess the quality of the collected data (Brink 1993). According to Schwandt (1997) in Creswell and Miller (2000) validity is defined as "*how accurately the account represents participants realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them*" (Schwandt 1997 in Creswell and Miller 2000, 124, 125). This statement argued that the lens used by researcher is essential in representing the studied phenomena to a wider population. The study of how mobility as livelihood strategy used by Myanmarese women migrant workers in Mizoram (India) has never been researched on or studied before in any kind of context. Therefore, the phenomena was explored through a semi-structured interviews with respondents

lived experiences and realities. Noble and Smith (2015) argued that in order to ensure the credibility of the study findings, it is important to account for personal bias as it can influence the findings and interpretation of the findings.

During the research, I might have had some previous bias as the research started out as an interest which binds me to read existing literature on women and mobility. And moreover, my own personal experience with the informal labour market and the exploitation of women in their work can likely influence how I interpreted the data collected. Thus, can affect the validity of the findings. Simultaneously, it is also crucial that the techniques and analytic procedures used for collecting the data remain consistent throughout the data collecting process (Noble and Smith 2015, 34). Additionally, it is also important to address the issue of positionality of the researcher as it can influence the credibility of the findings, for instance, minimising the power relation between the researcher and respondent (Nazneen and Sultan 2014, 63). As I shared common traits such as my gender as a woman, the culture, religion, and language with the respondents, I was able to gain their trust and establish myself as an '*insider*' in this study. This gave me an opportunity to access insights into their perspectives and understanding of their phrases, behaviour, and gestures which other '*outsider*' researchers might not be able to see and comprehend.

There are certain biases that can influence the validity of the research, for instance, the respondent's performance or researcher's interpretation can be adversely affected by their conditions of the day. As such, it was important for me as a researcher to have the interviews only when the respondents were free from their work, although it is likely that due to the stress of time even on their free day which is mostly on Sunday, they might even be more stressed to spare an hour or two for the interview. This can directly affect the quality of the data findings. Another factor which can affect the validity of the data findings can be in how the respondents can be affected by other respondents or people and can produce false responses if the interviews were carried out in an open space. To prevent this from happening, I was able to secure the house of one of their Church leader who also acts as a local gatekeeper for me where they can feel safe and be able to perform effectively.

Under some other researchers, the field material would have a different content and conclusion than the way I analysed and concluded. It is essential to clarify that the analysis and conclusion of the field material reflect my own interests and knowledge of the studied topic. Although the

questions were asked in the respondent's languages which are Tedim, Falam, and Hakha³, I also had to use the local language, Mizo⁴ to minimise the errors and improve the trustworthiness of the data collected.

2.5.1 Representativeness

The respondents in this study were of different age, belongs to different ethnicity with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, work situation, thus, the representativeness of the data for Myanmar female migrant labourers in Mizoram is unknown (Bryman 2012, 13,19). Moreover, as the respondents are concentrated in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram, thus, the findings and discussions in this cannot be generalised into a wider population due to the limited sampling size of the respondents.

There is also the dilemma of biased answers as many of the interviews with the respondents were conducted out of convenience and snowball sampling from the Church or from the same workplace, who might have shared and discussed the subject investigated (Bryman 2012, 13,18). Thus, can affect the outcome of the study. However, in no way do I claim that the respondents are representative of the whole Myanmar women community or the local community in Mizoram, India.

2.6 Ethical considerations

While conducting research, it is crucial that researchers follow the ethical principles as it directly links the integrity of the research conducted. I applied the ethical guidelines proposed by Bryman (2012) to the respondents which were to fully informed about the purpose and scope of the study, assuring that their anonymity and privacy will be protected, and lastly asking for their informed consent (Bryman 2012, 78-80). Before starting the interview, it was important that I informed the respondents that the research would not have any kind of benefits for the respondents as some of them have experience being exposed to by other researchers or NGOs, especially migrant workers from the handloom sectors. After taking the informed consent for their participation in the research, I constantly inform the respondents that they can withdraw from the interviews at all times. The contents of the interview guide were also explained briefly during informing them about the research, so as to not side-track from the research question. In

³ These are some of the ethnic languages in Myanmar, mostly used in Chin State, Myanmar.

⁴ Mizo is the official language of Mizoram and is used by the majority for verbal communication, along with English.

this way, I was able to create an environment and connection with the respondents, so that they can trust me as an individual and researcher, and as well confide and provide the information that I needed for the data.

An additional challenge that arises was protecting the anonymity of the participating respondents. It became crucial for me to present the findings in a manner that would not assist in identifying the respondents as the respondents had consented to participate in the research given that their identity and the information they provide remains confidential. For instance, information about the type of work they are engaged in or their age can help identify the respondents, hence, I developed pseudonyms to preserve their identities.

There are also certain occasions where I find it difficult to postulate questions concerning their attitude towards their socially constructed gender roles, their mobility, complications they faced during their mobility and at work, and not the least, their hopes for the future. For instance, by asking the respondents if they were subjected to discrimination at work or within their families or if by chance, the parents show any kind of preferential treatment towards their brothers. This kind of questions can bring about thoughts that they never dared to express before and thus, can be a sensitive topic to talk about as most of the respondents have a very strong urge to return to their hometown and make a living for their future. Nonetheless, the respondents were willing to respond and expressed their opinions without distrust, and this could be due to the fact that I had gained their trust and also partially shared their experiences as a migrant.

Another ethical challenge that has arisen during the fieldwork was that with limited access to economic resources, respondents were occupied with their work. The time that they engage themselves in the research might have interfered with their working hours, thus, there might be some expectations amongst the respondents that by participating in the research, it might benefit them economically. Though I could not provide them in huge monetary terms, I was able to show them my gratitude for taking their time by serving tea and snacks during the interview. The respondents were also given money for their transport fare and as well snacks for their children. After submitting the thesis, I tend to send an appreciation letter to all the respondents for their participation and contribution to the study.

Furthermore, the thesis has followed and will continue to follow the ethical principles for using secondary sources, including citation of documents. Also, my background as a Myanmarrese-

Norwegian woman migrating and facing similar situations before might have affected my perception of the situation and experiences that these women faced. Therefore, it is essential for me to point out that the data are my own interpretation of the situations and realities of these women and other relevant respondents.

3 BACKGROUNDS

3.1 The notions of Myanmarese migrants in India

The flow of migration and mobility between the state of Mizoram, a north-eastern state of India and the western part of Myanmar⁵ i.e. Chin State, Sagaing Division and Arakan State is a commonplace event that can be traced back during the pre-Independence period where the two countries were part of British India (Basavapatna 2011, 125). In order to understand the complicated relationship and how mobility between the two countries increases during the recent years, it is crucial to understand the history of both India and Myanmar. India's foreign policy towards Myanmar started out as a bilateral relationship, agreed upon by the then leaders of both the countries, Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu during the late 1940s (Kundu 2012). However, with the rise of General Ne Win, Myanmar became an authoritarian regime under his leadership and thus, India alienated itself from the military regime and extended its full support towards the pro-democratic movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi (Kundu 2012). By extending its support, India shelter Myanmarese refugees during the regime. However, after Myanmar gained democracy in 2011 with the new constitution, the bilateral relationship between India and Myanmar continue to grow as more Myanmarese migrate to mostly the North-eastern part of India for labour employment.

Due to the porous borders between Mizoram and Myanmar, the flow of legal and illegal goods, and migrants continued to Mizoram and other parts of North-East India which led to the Young Mizo Association (YMA)⁶ to threat or deport illegal Myanmarese migrants (Basavapatna 2011, 125-126). Basavapatna (2011) also speculates that although there is common cultural and religious similarity between Myanmarese⁷ and Mizos⁸, the hostility and indifferent attitude towards Myanmarese migrants who works as daily wagers, domestic help or petty gatherers are perceptible (Basavapatna 2011, 126). Moreover, the perception of the complex nature of migration on both Myanmarese community and Mizo state dominates the received notions as it would unclose Mizo society to criticism and bring a bad name to Mizos (Basavapatna 2011,

⁵ The demography of Myanmar constitutes of diverse ethnic groups with diverse mother-tongue. I would like to state that, in no way do the findings and discussions attempt to apply to the Myanmar population as a whole.

⁶ A non-political and voluntary organisation, works for the conservation of Mizo Culture and heritage, also other community welfare activities are taken up the YMA.

⁷ In this context, Myanmarese refers mostly to the Chins of Myanmar.

⁸ The people residing in Mizoram are called 'Mizo' or hereby referred to as locals.

126). This is so because the prevalent notions of Myanmar migrants in Mizoram are perceived to have a negative impact of Myanmar migration on Mizo society and culture.

As Basavapatna (2011) opined, the Myanmar migrants in Mizoram are used to be categorised as '*refugees*' or '*illegal migrants*'. These '*illegal migrants*' in Northeast India are predominantly Chin and estimates from the population of about 50000 to 100000. Moreover, as the Myanmar in India is no longer officially recognised as refugees, the numbers of these migrants can vary (Basavapatna 2011, 127). Today, there are still many Myanmar living in Delhi despite the ongoing democratisation of Myanmar and are recognised by the Office of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as refugees. They are also issued Residence Permits and vaguely recognised by the Indian government. However, the Myanmar living in Mizoram are perceived to be '*economic migrants*' as they are motivated to improve their living conditions and to get better job opportunities which Mizoram is able to provide (Basavapatna 2011, 132).

The number of Myanmar nationals living in Mizoram is estimated to be about 70,000 to 100,000 (Basavapatna 2011, 133) and are rising in numbers due to the recent pouring in of Myanmar Arakan nationals. Many of these Myanmar works in the informal sector such as weaving, handloom, tenant farming, quarries, road construction, trade, housekeeping, au pair and domestic work (ibid.). As such, most of the Myanmar economic migrants contribute to about 84.08 percent of total international migration to Mizoram (cited in Basavapatna 2011, 134)⁹ and argued that the labour and employment opportunity is the main reason of motivation. Most of these economic migrants are women who have taken menial jobs as most of these migrants often find obstacles in the form of low income, sexual violation, and domestic violence due to their sexual difference.

The Myanmar women often risk working in abusive and exploitative environment, for example, they often are employed as traditional handloom weavers, where they are required to work long hours and live at the workplace. Many of these women are not paid salaries per month, however, receive wages on a piece-by-piece basis of their work which depends on the complexity of the weaving patterns and how much they are sold for at the market (ibid.). The

⁹ An unpublished MPhil dissertation of the Department of Economics, Mizoram University, titled "The Pattern of Migration and its Effects on Economic Development with Special Reference to Mizoram" cited in (Basavapatna 2011, 134).

women in these kinds of work often have to squeeze themselves into small rooms as the machines often take a large amount of space and therefore, there is little space for privacy and room to sleep for them. On the other hand, they are forced/bound to undertake such severe conditions as it is their only form of having an income to support their impoverished families residing in Myanmar.

Though the studies of Myanmar economic migrants in Mizoram or India is scarce, Myanmar migrants contribute about 84.08 percentage of international migration to Mizoram (Basavapatna 2011, 134). Thus, it is justifiable to say that Myanmar migrants have played a vital role in contributing to the economy of Mizoram as they respond to the increasing demands of low skilled work and wages such as domestic work, wage labourers, etc. In order to foster a better relationship between Mizo's and Myanmar nationals living in Mizoram, various Myanmar organisations such as Women's League of Chinland (WLC), Human Rights and Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) are set up to give legal protection, health care, advocacy and training to the Myanmar migrants (Basavapatna 2011, 133), whereas NGO's like Samaritan Society of Mizoram (SSM), Ferrando Integrated Women's Development Centre (FIWDC) provides health care and protects women from domestic abuse whereas as local organisations like Mizoram Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and Young Mizo Association (YMA) played a vital role in the relationship between Myanmar and Mizo (ibid.).

3.2 Gender in Myanmar context

The notion of gender and sex have been used interchangeably but have changed over the years. The idea of sex and gender changed drastically from the early 1960s until today where gender is thought to be more than a biological difference between man and woman. However, it has changed to the socially constructed male/female distinction that exists in a society where the male is seen to be '*powerful*' or '*masculine*', whereas the female is seen to be '*weak*' or '*feminine*' (Richardson 2015, 3). Thus, gender can be defined as a social and cultural construct of women and men, which also vary across time and place whereas sex refers to the biological differences between males and females. In this manner, gender can be used as an analytical tool as it can generate an understanding of the underlying complex lives of women, how their mobility is influenced by the complexities of their lives and the various dilemmas they face during their stay in Mizoram. However, it is crucial to understand that the experiences these

Myanmarese women migrants have can vary as each experience and understand gender according to their own background, culture, language, and identity.

In essence, men and women have equal rights in Myanmar, however, when it comes to tasks and responsibility, it is often gendered specific. For instance, men and women do agricultural work, however, men often have the task of planting and sowing seeds whereas women tend do most domestic work (Advameg Inc. 2018). Daw Mya Sein (1958) asserts that women in Myanmar have always retained their rights long before when women in Asia have had to fight for theirs. However, under the military regime, women rights become suppressed as they become more subservient towards their counterpart as well with their gender roles. Though transitioned from the military regime to democracy, women are still expected to follow their given ‘gendered’ task such as taking care of the household, the elderly, offspring’s reproduction, and other domestic responsibilities. On the contrast, men are expected to be the head and breadwinner of the household, and leaders. This kind of traditional roles can hinder progress and transformation that women can contribute through migration.

Sex	Age	Myanmar (in %)	South East Asia (in %)
Men and women	Total 15+	74	67
	Youth 15-24	50	44
	Adult 25+	82	74
Men	Total 15+	77	78
	Youth 15-24	50	51
	Adult 25+	87	87
Women	Total 15+	71	56
	Youth 15-24	50	37
	Adult 25+	78	62

Table 2 Employment-to-population ration, Age and Gender distribution. (Source: UNDP Myanmar (2011, 56-57) and Danish Trade Council for International Development and Cooperation (2016, 9)).

According to the UNDP Myanmar (2011) and Danish Trade Council for International Development and Cooperation (2016), women in Myanmar are represented inadequately in both decision-making process, and is related to cultural issues and barriers that prevent women from participating in the process. Moreover, due to their pre-assigned gender roles,

Myanmarese women are expected not to involve with the productive roles that are expected from men. Therefore, the movement of Myanmarese women for better employment opportunities is very limited as they are restricted within their gender roles from their country of origin. However, in recent years, it has come to light that more women have started using mobility to other urban areas, or countries as a livelihood strategy and has challenged the gender roles upon arrival and during their stay in the destination country.

3.3 Mobility in Myanmarese context

Mobility can be defined as the state of being mobile or in constant movement in search of a better livelihood quality. It is a contemporary paradigm that cannot be described without taking into account the “*spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities*” (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006, 3) or without acknowledging the “*power geometries of everyday life*” (Massey 1993) (cited in Uteng and Cresswell 2008, 70). As stressed by Braidotti (1994), women have come a long way from their construction of being immobile or stable, to being seen as active mobile agents (Fay 2008, 70). The mobility of Myanmarese women is often restricted because of their gender roles and household economic factors which hinder the opportunity to enhance their livelihood.

Through mobility, most women can acquire empowerment by participating in income generating activities such as weaving, handloom, and handicrafts, vegetable vendors, or opening small hardware shops. In the context of Myanmar’s cultural context, the movement of young women from a rural area often were restricted due to being culturally disadvantaged by social prejudices, thus, have low mobility. However, many young women have started venturing out to neighbouring or Western countries for gaining a prestigious education, nonetheless, this only applies to people who live in the city or can actually afford it. Further, this kind of mobility still does not apply to young women from a rural background and therefore, are subjugated to enter the labour market through forced or involuntary movement. These forced or involuntary movement can be an effect of extreme poverty, moreover, the loss of livelihood in less developed countries due to the death of a breadwinner increases the likelihood of women, first being trafficked for sex and later, subjected to low-skilled labour in their destination country.

For these Myanmar women residing in Mizoram, they are coerced to be involved in multiple activities or engage themselves in the activities that are available to them whether it is an arduous activity or not. Moreover, migration has become a coping strategy for most families in Myanmar as remittances have become a major source of income. As mentioned earlier, women migrant workers often are concentrated in low-skilled, and degrading work and often have to suffer abuse as they are poorly protected. For instance, they often are likely to be exploited by local employers by holding back their pay, thus, restricting them to be more mobile. This is so due to women migrants entering into the destination countries through an illegal channel or brokers (Asian Development Bank et al. 2016, 72). Though the data for the percentage of Myanmar population migrating for work is scarce due to undocumented migrant workers, about 10 percent of migrant workers resides internationally (UN Women 2013, 14). Many of these undocumented women migrants often risk ill-treatment and deportation (ibid., 19).

Destination	Number	% of all migrants	Male	%	Female	%
All countries	2,021,910 2,071,910 ¹⁰	100	1,233,168	61	788,742	39
Thailand	1,418,472	70.2	812,798	57.3	605,672	42.7
Malaysia	303,996	15	245,772	80.8	58,224	19.2
China	92,263	4.6	53,126	57.6	39,137	42.4
Singapore	79,659	3.9	39,078	49	40,581	51
India ¹¹	50,000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Table 3 Myanmar international migrants by destination, 2014 Myanmar Population Census. (Source: ILO (1996-2016)).

3.4 Gender and mobility in the context of Mizoram (the study site)

The study of women migrants living near the border is given little attention, especially the cross-border movement of Chin Myanmar women in Mizoram and the gendered aspect that influences their transnational mobility and their lives (Pessar and Mahler 2003, 812). This study will provide insight into the motivation to those female labourers who choose to migrate and to employers who fuel the cross-border movement of Myanmar women labourers in India. According to (Basavapatna 2012), the status of refugee, economic migrants and statelessness overlap each other for the Myanmar community in India (Basavapatna 2012, 67). Further, she explains that women mostly experience and negotiate with the complex social, political and economic

web of relationships, and are labelled as intruders or illegals (Banerjee and Chaudhury 2011, xxiii). Often times, the crucial role of women in the economic development and their conditions are overlooked, however, as Basavapatna argued women should not be overlooked as they are an integral part of development whether it be economic or human development to both the host country and sending country (Basavapatna 2012).

Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom (2014) emphasise that women's role in India is still a major concern of discourse (Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom 2014, 31). Though men and women are mixed in the context of social life, women are not as liberated and are still regarded as subordinate to men, thus, are discriminated against in their various aspects of life (Lalhriatpuii 2010 cited in, Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom 2014). Lalhriatpuii (2010) opines that Mizoram as an agriculture-dominated state has revealed the experience of gender discrimination in the development of the economy (Lalhriatpuii 2010, 133). The involvement and contributions of local women in the informal labour market are neither recognised nor valued in monetary terms and are not recognised as producers (ibid.). Furthermore, she argued that the changing patterns of work and employment in Mizoram are undermining women workers and is further pushing them more to move to the informal sectors (ibid.). Similarly, as women migrant workers, local Mizo women are also struggling for survival, thus are compelled to take up jobs which are futile and without job security (Lalhriatpuii 2010, 134).

Women in Mizoram used to be less regarded and has often no say in any kind of decision making whether it is at home or outside (Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom 2014, 32). This reflects that the representation of Mizo women in the labour market is not valued due to their gender roles. However, in recent years, Mizo women are making significant changes and are more involved in the decision-making process and labour market. In spite of that, there is a high concentration of women in the informal labour market due to the complexity of social, economic and cultural factors (Lalhriatpuii 2010, 134). In addition, due to the influx of women migrant workers from Myanmar, jobs in the informal labour market is limited for both the locals and the migrants (Lalhriatpuii 2010, 134-135). Thus, the competition for work between the local Mizo women and migrant women become fierce where they are both underpaid and unvalued for the work they have conducted. For instance, work such as domestic work, agricultural sector, au pair, rock splitter or working in illicit liquor dens in the informal labour market become tough, and many of these women are forced to work in such jobs.

As the state of Mizoram is dominated by traditional patriarchal and patrilineal Indian society, the construction of women thus is governed by patriarchal ideologies where women are entitled to limited privileges. For instances, in contrast to men's work, women's work and their income do not always give power or an independent status (Lalhriatpuii 2010, 140). Howsoever, the study also shows the socio-economic status of a family has a great impact on women's contribution to the family. For instance, in lower socio-economic status, the proportion of total income contributed by women is higher than men (Lalhriatpuii 2010, 140). Women in urban areas also tend to engage themselves in formal labour sector if possess the requisite skills, education, and experiences. On the contrary, women in rural areas contribute to the family's income from the informal sectors such as weaving, sewing, and handloom products.

There has also been an increase in Mizo women's mobility to other developed countries for better work opportunities both in the informal and formal sector and also as a strategy for a better livelihood. Thus, leaving a high demand for cheap and skilled work in the labour market. The present condition for Myanmar women migrants residing in Mizoram is that they have to compete with local Mizo women and old economic migrants from other states of India mostly in the informal labour market. This is so due to their illegal migrant status and also due to their limited literacy. Moreover, their mobility is on account of their gender, status in the family and age difference. These women reciprocated their mobility by sending remittances and other commodities to their families back in Myanmar. This shows that Myanmar women in Mizoram are more capable and are more willing to work in remote areas as well in jobs that are not suitable for their health. Though forced to migrate due to their poverty and in search of a better livelihood, these Myanmar women migrant labourers do not see themselves as incapable. At the same time, due to their gender, these women face mental and physical abuse by both their employer's and spouses due to their shortcomings in work or illegal status.

3.5 The study site

Though there are six other districts such as Lunglei, Lawngtlai, Champhai, Saiha, Mamit, Kolasib and Serchhip in Mizoram, this study focuses on one district in Mizoram, namely Aizawl district which is located in the northern part of Mizoram. Among the 23 towns in the state of Mizoram, Aizawl shared the highest number of percentage in the total population of towns (Hlawndo, Sailo, and Kanagaraj 2015, 517, Census Population Data 2015). Aizawl district is the centre of administration of Mizoram State where all the important government

offices, state assembly house, and civil secretariat are seated. Moreover, many migrants tend to gather around the areas of Aizawl, Lawngtlai, Lunglei, Champhai, but due to security reasons, Aizawl City was chosen as the main study site.

Figure 2 Map of Mizoram (Source: SINLUNG (2014))



3.5.1 Aizawl City

Aizawl City was first established as Aijal, a fortified post of the British in 1890 which was a large village and gradually expanded into a town with the regrouping of villages in Mizoram (Hlawndo, Sailo, and Kanagaraj 2015, 517). With a resident population of 293,416, the male population constitutes 49,20 percent whereas the remaining 50,80 percent is made up of the female population (Aizawl Municipal Corporation 2018, Census Population Data 2015). According to Hlawndo, Sailo, and Kanagaraj (2015), Aizawl is the most populated town in the state with a rapidly growing urban centre and is constantly growing due to the high growth of people migrating from rural areas to the urban areas in search of a better livelihood.



Figure 3 Map of Myanmar (Source: On the world map (2012-2018))

in the peripheral of the city, the locality is crowded mainly with rock splitters, day labourers, and illicit liquor dens, with no health centre nearby (Saitluanga 2017, 98). According to Saitluanga (2017), Rangvamual area the least developed locality and an outer peripheral slum as it is located at a great distance from other localities, and is mostly covered with uninhabited lands (Saitluanga 2017, 124).

Muanna Veng

Muanna Veng is located in the outer-peripheral of Aizawl city and has a population of 6370/1017 and 819/250 households respectively (Saitluanga 2017, 131). The households in Muanna Veng constitutes mostly of Myanmarese Chin and ethnic Myanmarese migrants who are employed with the Handloom Association and is characterised relatively by lower socio-economic status. Additionally, Muanna Veng is considered to be a ‘*hub*’ for illicit liquor dens driven by both local Mizo’s and economic migrants.

Ramrikawn

Ramrikawn is located in the western outer-peripheral of Aizawl city and is closest to Tanhril and Tuivamit area. It is a peri-urban area and is very densely located commercial area with markets, bus as well as taxi stands. Due to the existence of the office of Food Corporation of India (FCI) which provides space for food storage for the whole of Mizoram states, there is a frequent movement of heavy-duty vehicles from all over India. This area also has a large scale of stone quarrying activities (Rai and Chutia 2014, 858). According to Rai and Chutia (2014), it is a hotspot region for Indo-Burma as this may be due to the high demands and availability of work as quarry rock splitters.

Tanhril

Tanhril is also located in the western outer-peripheral of Aizawl city, and is closed to Rangvamual. Tanhril is a rural area having low vehicular activity (Rai and Chutia 2014, 859). As Ramrikawn, the area also has a large scale of stone quarrying activities and constructions, and a large concentration of migrant workers used to live in the construction areas.

Chanmari

Chanmari is located in the closed to central town. The area is a residential complex that teems with tourism-related establishments and shopping centres. There are 1222 households in

Chanmari and a population of 5959 (Saitluanga 2017, 131). Chanmari constitutes mainly of middle-class Mizo's with relatively older population and smaller family size, thus, a large number of migrant workers are working as caretakers, day labourers, and maids in the area (Saitluanga 2017, 122).

Khatla

Khatla is also a residential complex which is located in the central south of the city. As Chanmari and Dawrpui Vengthar, sufficient amount of day labourers and housemaid can be seen around the locality. The locality of Khatla has 540 households with a population of 3120 (Saitluanga 2017, 132). The area of Khatla is characterised by high-class Mizo's population with a high proportion of working women, small and young family, thus, the increasing demands of maids and au pair (Saitluanga 2017, 122).

Bawngkawn

Bawngkawn is located in the northern part of the town and is closed to Zuangtui and Muanna Veng. The population of Bawngkawn is 7386 and a total of 1552 households. As Chanmari, the locality is clustered with medium class Mizo's (Saitluanga 2017, 131, 122). Additionally, it is wise to pinpoint that during the fieldwork, I have also observed that Bawngkawn locality is an important location for Aizawl city as it connects other districts of Mizoram state through the main road, and thus, is a route that is undertaken by migrant workers from all over India as well as from Myanmar.

Dawrpui Vengthar

With a household size of 691 and a population of 3522, Dawrpui Vengthar is located in the central southern part of the town (Saitluanga 2017, 132, 135). As Khatla locality, the area comprises of residential complex and is characterised by high-class modern Mizo's and as such there exists more migrant workers working as housemaids, caretakers or au pair than other localities of the city.

4 THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

What are the causes and challenges faced by women migrants upon arrival and during their stay in Mizoram? What kind of work conditions are they subject to as migrants? In what ways has their mobility as a livelihood strategy contribute to the transformation of their gender roles and livelihoods? In order to address these questions, the distinction between gender and sex needs to be clarify and understand how gender roles ascribe to the migration of Myanmar women for seeking a better livelihood opportunity.

Moreover, this thesis will explore a broader understanding of why these women migrate, what impel their decision to migrate, and the daily challenges that they faced both in their home and receiving country. Thus, this thesis will also provide an overview of the feminist approach of mobility, by introducing the concept of the feminisation of labour migration to describe how the experience in the migration pattern between men and women differs, and how these differences have implications for their experiences in the labour market (Piper 2008, 1288). Moreover, as the main motivation for their mobility is often related to poverty and the socio-economic conditions in their household, it was crucial to employ the concept of the feminisation of poverty as women are often affected by the growing poverty in the country. And thus, are motivated to use mobility as livelihood strategy to transform their livelihoods and therefore, is crucial in understanding the mobility of Myanmar women migrant workers.

4.1 Gender

It is fundamental to understand the difference between the concept of '*gender*' and '*sex*' so that we understand how gender roles are produced. The distinction between sex and gender is a classic topic in feminist studies where '*sex*' refers to the physical differences and as well the sexual characteristics between men and women (Richardson 2015, 6,7). On the other hand, gender depicts the way in which sex is experience, the way in which sex become socially constructed through the assumption of society's values and beliefs and how women and men are expected to conduct themselves accordingly (Blackstone 2003, 335). It also denotes that there are two specific sexual characteristics the fact of being of a man or a woman which correspond social expectations based on specific behaviours where women are expected to be responsible for care duties or reproductive roles whereas men are responsible for main economic provision (Blackstone 2003, 335). The concept of '*gender*' and '*sex*' are used interchangeably over the years, however, the concept of gender has distinguished itself from

sex by referring to the ideological and material relations between men and women (Richardson 2015, 6). Feminist theory opines on the socially constructed differentiation between the characteristics of the '*privileged masculine*' and the '*depreciate feminine*' (Peterson 2004, 5). In other words, being masculine or feminine does not describe the biological or natural characteristics of the individual, but the institutionalised, behaviours, and social expectations as masculine or feminine (Peterson 2004, 5). As the foremost social scientists to distinguish between the concept of gender from the concept of sex, Oakley (1972) in Blackstone (2003, 336) also reinforces that the concept of gender parallel the biological distinction of sex into male and female, and also involves the social division and understanding of what masculinity and femininity is. Thus, signifies that gender is constructed socially (Blackstone 2003, 336).

As such, gender can be defined as the characteristics that are embedded in being women and men, that is to say, that it is socially and culturally constructed idea of how women or men should behave or is expected by social peers. Furthermore, as gender denotes the social factors, it also varies across time and place (Mikkola 2008). Moreover, it also shapes the disproportionate power dynamics between men and women where there is an unequal disadvantage, position, obligations, and opportunities (Lund, Doneys, and Resurreccion 2015, 1). Accordingly, the roles that Myanmarese women play in their everyday lives derives from the custom and tradition as they provide bases for their exploitation and experiences (Belak 2002, 33). Thus, it is crucial to employ gender as an analytical tool which Peterson (2004) further stresses that by using gender as an analytical tool, the social relation of gender hierarchies which is currently existing in the various cultures and traditions of the world will be more comprehensible (Peterson 2004, 5, 7). Further by using the gender lens as an analytical tool, we can determine and understand why and how women are far more represented in the flow of labour migration between India and Mizoram, explore how their experiences as a female migrant worker has impacted their livelihood and in what ways has it contributed to the transformation of their livelihoods both in the receiving and sending countries.

As mentioned, appropriate gender roles are assigned to women behaviour as a consequence of society's own assumption of values and beliefs. For instance, in Myanmar, the notions of women and their traditional roles are articulated in the old traditional proverb and many women in Myanmar has to adhere to these roles to be considered '*good woman*' (Belak 2002, 36). Myanmarese women are burden with the tasks of preserving culture, thus are not given equal entitlements and access to resources to change and develop (Belak 2002, 38). It influences how

decisions are taken for women by the woman themselves, and by their families. For instance, the role of daughters in Myanmar society is seen as a provider for their parents, whereas sons are seen as provider for the life beyond (Belak 2002, 42). Besides, women and girls are also seen as a property for others as when married and boys as the preserver of the family line (ibid.). Thus, the feeling of being inferior to men is embedded in the women's understanding ergo their decisions to migrate. Through their migration, women in Myanmar are able to change these assumed gender roles and reinforce it.

The feminists in 1960s started a movement to end the oppression of women by men in the social hierarchy, which is to say that women are seen as inferior to men, passive beings with a surge of emotions and more likely to be sensitive whereas men are seen as the logical and aggressive being. Moreover, as the gender roles subjected women particularly to a set of characteristics associated with being feminine, women did not have the privilege of being equal with their counterparts. In certain cultures and society, for example, women in Chin State¹⁰ (Myanmar) are expected to be a subordinate of men and are scrutinised if '*failed*' to conform to such traditional roles (Thein 2015, 3). Thein (2015) also stresses that appropriate cultural and traditional gender norms in Myanmar are taught and reinforced by the society which makes it apparent that men and women did not share the same equal opportunities. Nonetheless, it is crucial to understand how feminist theory stresses on the distinction between the biological sex and socially constructed gender (Peterson 2004, 2). Peterson also further argued that categorising gender or in how acknowledging how certain gender should behave according to the expected norms, influence how theories are constructed and conceptualised (Peterson 2004, 2,3).

Since the experiences of women differ across time and place, it is important to be cautious to how words are structure, act, and perceive culture. Seeing that women experiences of gender are different in the context of one's culture and identity, it is not representative for all women. In order to explore how women's mobility has contributed to livelihood transformation, it is crucial to analyse the concept of gender in relation to other factors such as culture, education, socio-economic status, and mobility.

¹⁰ Chin State lies in north-western part of Myanmar. I refer to Chin State as I am more familiar to the traditions and cultures of the State.

4.2 Mobility as a livelihood strategy

Mobility is a broad concept and can be defined in several aspects of a human life (Inkinen 2008, 214). It can also refer to the displacement of people and objects, or people travelling for work, leisure, migration or refuge (Cattan 2008, 86, Inkinen 2008, 214). It can be summed up as the ability and willingness to move or change. This movement can be either short-term or circular. Similarly, Uteng and Cresswell (2008, 2) opine that mobility also involves “*potential for undertaking movement as it is lived and experienced*”. It further shows that mobility is gendered as each mobility can be influenced by the demand of gendered workforce in the labour market or at home, or contributes to the reproduction of gendered power hierarchies (Uteng and Cresswell 2008, 2).

Thus, mobility is gendered as the migration pattern, experiences, obligations, duties towards their families are already gendered prior to their migration and mobility. Mobility as an analytical tool can contribute to the understanding of how women use mobility as a livelihood strategy for better their livelihoods quality through labour migration, at what extends has the labour migration of these women consequences on their families, and in what form does gender plays a role during and while the migration process. According to Fay (2008), women are restricted to have the freedom to transform their lives traditionally, however, due to the emergence of mobility studies, women are now more visible and are seen as mobile agents for livelihood transformations (Fay 2008, 70). Mobility patterns of women and men differ due to the distinction of gender that exists in the society and is mainly accounted for by the division of roles in the labour market and the family, which also affect women’s employment conditions, income and mobility needs (CIVITAS WIKI 2014, 7). Thus, mobility and gender are correlated to each other as gender determined the type of mobility’s one is entitled to on the basis of their socially constructed gender roles; and moreover, mobility also determines the level of women’s and men’s access to participation in changing and transforming their livelihoods.

In order to understand why women are partaking in migration, it is, therefore, crucial to gain an understanding of the concept ‘*livelihood*’ and the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy. The notion of ‘*livelihood*’ is characterised by the way in which impoverished people in developing countries are using a certain method such as, migration to enhance their livelihoods (De Haan 2012, 345). As such, livelihood refers to the means people use to sustain their livelihood through earning, gaining, getting, making or seeking a livelihood. The term connotes the means and strategies to find a better way to survive, maintain and sustain their livelihood through the

use of available resources. On account of using mobility as a livelihood strategy, we get to look at the complexity of women's livelihoods and especially in a community where gender roles are restrained by the socio-economic conditions and cultural practices. We also get to look at the strategies they pursued for a better livelihood and the opportunities and challenges that they faced during their migration.

In varying degrees, rural households in developing countries have undertaken a variety of livelihood strategies from activities that surpluses economic or other gains for better livelihoods (De Haan, Brock, and Coulibaly 2002, 38-39). According to Gaillard et al. (2009), livelihood denotes a complex, diverse and dynamic strategies use for meeting the household needs as it does not only refer to a single activity (De Haan 2012, 347). Additionally, Lund et al. (2013) also opine that mobility has been used as a livelihood strategy to maintain a lifestyle which denotes the use of places as resources and capital in the pursuit (Lund et al. 2013, 7). In the case of Myanmar women, the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy is finding a way for them to survive and improve their livelihood quality.

In some traditional communities, mobility and migration for certain job opportunities are restricted to men, thus, directly implying that mobility and migration are dominated by men, whereas women are expected to be a preserver of home (Morokvasic 2014, 360). Nana Oishi (2005) also opines that mobility in some states in Asia is often prohibited or banned by their family and community. However, women are more affected and vulnerable by the socio-economic conditions of the country and are known to spiral down the vicious poverty circle. Therefore, mobility and migration for work become a livelihood strategy for women in recent years to alleviate poverty and to secure their livelihood.

4.3 Feminisation of labour migration

The term feminisation of labour migration derived from the increasing participation of women in the migration pattern. However, there has been a discourse on how the term feminisation of labour migration has been misleading as it suggests an increase of women migrants in the last decades, when women have already made up nearly 47 percent of international migration during the 1960s and an increased in 2 percent the next four decades (Paiewonsky 2007, 4). Correspondingly, the number of women migrants from Asia has surpassed that of men especially from the developing countries (Piper 2008, 1291). Women have played an essential

role in the changing migratory pattern and have taken the role and responsibility of a breadwinner of the family, i.e. through remittances. Another reason for the increased mobility and migration is the increasing demand for jobs in the so-called feminised sectors which are mostly compounded in the informal sector (Piper 2008, 1292). At the same time, with the decreasing availability of work opportunities for men, women and daughters are pushed to take the role of becoming the main provider for the family (ibid.). In general, women have always migrated but have migrated in different ways, for example, as a family dependant to their husband abroad. However, in the last decade's women have migrated in a pioneer way either as a job seeker, and not only for economic reasons, but also to realise their dreams or to participate and create new social relations.

Pettman (1998) opines that due to the process of globalisation, the feminisation of labour migration reflects the increasing sexual division of labour and how these effects altered the livelihood strategies (Pettman 1998, 393). The feminisation of labour migration also helps to underline visibility to the work done by women which often are care work or other undervalued works such as rock splitters, day labourers, domestic help, or factory workers (Piper 2008, 1291-1292). For some women migrants, migration is seen as a way of emancipating from the social constraints of gender roles, and offer them the possibility of becoming the breadwinner, a role which is traditionally assigned to men. Thus, women have the prospect of taking up the traditional role of men. These migratory movements have also portrayed an exploitation of women from local to a global level as of the starting point of their migration to reaching their destination. For instance, women migrants often have to suffer unwelcome advances or actual violence as they are seen to be beyond the control of their families (Pettman 1998, 393).

Though they essentially become the breadwinner, many women migrants are not earning for their own economic independence but for remitting and serving the purpose of supporting their families instead of their own economic independence. As feminisation of labour migration highlights the increasing movement of women for work, it is also crucial to emphasise the women's contribution to the prosperity and creation of wealth in both the sending and receiving countries. In several ways, women as migrant workers have a particular role in the creation of wealth and increasing it for developed countries as they are the main producers of labour forces. Although a contributor through remittances and labour force, they are rarely seen as one by their community but are seen as a huge burden due to their peculiar gender roles. Additionally, gender studies on migration open reflection on migrant women as a real subject of change and

not of victims or passive mobile actors. Therefore, it is important to give voices to these persons and see how these agencies are politicising their activities.

As human mobility increases, migration between cross-border movements for labour has also assumed gendered dimensions with the entanglement of migration flows, trends, and patterns (Sijapati 2015). In the manner that men are increasingly unable to fulfil their traditional and constructed roles as the economic providers of the family, more women are also migrating more independently for job opportunities, and no longer as co-dependent of their spouses or other male family members (Paiewonsky 2007, 1, Piper 2008). Though migration can be a result of poverty or other social issues, it is hardly the poorest who migrate due to the costs and opportunities involved. Withal, women migrants often have to face more implications than men due to their constant mobility and situated gender roles. Further, women are more exposed to vulnerabilities, discrimination and more risk than men, both in their origin and destination countries (Sijapati and Nair 2014).

Moreover, through labour mobility, women attain the capacity to provide opportunities to a better quality of livelihoods to them and their families, and as well in assisting to escape for the economic and social vulnerabilities that they are constantly facing in their everyday life and not the least, also contribute to the empowerment of women. Additionally, migration can also contribute to redefining the existing gendered dimensions by offering more opportunity to women in the global labour market (Omelaniuk 2005, 1). Though women are less paid and less regarded in the realm of employment, by becoming primary wage earners in domestic and cleaning jobs, women in developing countries have the ability to improve their living standards at home. Simultaneously, many migrant women workers are employed in the informal economy, and are often undocumented/ or trafficked (UN Women 2013, 6, 10). According to Sijapati (2015), women migrant workers tend to be seen as young, needy, flexible, and disposable labour force (Sijapati 2015, 4), and as such are in high demand primarily in domestic, health care, garment and handloom sector.

As already stated, there are also certain social, economic and political determinants that influence women's labour migration. These determinants can act as a pull or push factors as in the lack of job opportunities in the home country which can be caused by cultural norms that refuse to give equal access to women in the labour market or women being seen as a burden, policies that are enacted at the national macro level to either protect or compel women to

migrate, or other cumulative causation (Sijapati 2015, 4). According to Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), an NGO based in Yangon, rural poverty, unemployment, lack of economic opportunity, and fragile livelihoods are the key push factors of labour migration in Myanmar (Ma 2017) which affect largely the women's population.

4.4 Feminisation of poverty and work

As women are affected severely due to economic instability and often have to migrate, the feminisation of migrations is often interlinked with feminisation of poverty. This is so because, women migrate mostly in order to sustain their families, which redefines the traditional gender roles within families and societies (Gouws 2010, 2). The feminisation of poverty is a phenomenon that describes the widening gap of poverty between women and men. It highlights the representation of women in poverty is highly disproportionate in comparison to that of men. Not only that when women are affected, so are children, thus, widening the already existing poverty. Therefore, feminisation of poverty is an important approach to better understand the mobility of women as it becomes the main determinant factor for using mobility as a livelihood strategy, the impact on their roles and transformation on their livelihoods.

The feminisation of poverty was first coined in the 1970s but remains unrecognised until the last two decades (Chant 2008, 166). According to Chant (2008), feminisation of poverty is not about lack of economic incentives/growth, but also the importance of conceptualising a holistic framework to encapsulate gendered deprivation which aimed the recognition of women's active participation, capability, and development within their families, community, and largely at a global level (Chant 2008, 167). Women living in poverty is not just a mere issue for women but is a concern for all as feminised poverty is a vicious cycle of poverty inflicted upon women and children and threatens their well-being, livelihoods, and families.

The feminisation of poverty is a major determinant for Myanmar women in seeking work in the labour market in neighbouring countries. This is so because the remittances that they send have a significant impact in reducing poverty, thus, transforming to a better quality of life for both their own and families. Due to poverty, women tend to be confined to their gender roles as caretaker of the family while men's mobility is ceaseless as the breadwinner of the family (Piper 2008, 1292). At the same time, poverty has also contributed to women breaking the imposed gender restriction upon their mobility by the migration of women from poorer families

to a great extent for the survival of their families. Bhadra (2007) also opines that the trend of feminisation of migration is the causal effect of the feminisation of poverty (Bhadra 2007, 11). As such women in dire poverty often choose to migrate through the illegal channel or rarely through the legal channel, and often use brokers for new or dangerous routes. Consequently, due to the high cost of broker fees, many women migrants inclined to sell off their assets, or borrow from a loan shark with high interests and often end up in a vicious cycle of debt and poverty which worsens their livelihoods.

The feminisation of poverty is a trend that is co-existing together with the feminisation of work in most developing countries (Ahmed 1994). For instance, the way in which gender roles shape the unequal distribution of resources and how women are mostly affected by it. The feminisation of work is a term that refers to the rapid increase in the participation of women in paid work (Kanji and Menon 2001, 1). According to Kanji and Menon (2001), about 60 percent of women in developing countries are engaged in paid work, however, it does not capture women's work in the informal sector (Kanji and Menon 2001, 1). This is no doubt due to the existing gender roles which discern women's work as a reproductive domain and prevents them from accessing education, training, and resources (Kanji and Menon 2001, 2). As such, it is reasonable to emphasise that the labour market is also segmented by the preconception of gender (UNRISD 2005, 67).

As women are constantly experiencing poverty, they tend to be concentrated in the informal sector as housemaids or caretakers with relatively low paid and poor working conditions (UNRISD 2005). Nevertheless, the informal sector maintains the opportunity for women migrant workers to acquire work and have better opportunities for their livelihoods (Kanji and Menon 2001). Women working in the informal sector has worse prospects for advancement as they tend to have lower pay with poor working conditions (UNRISD 2005, 67-68). Nonetheless, earning money itself reduces women migrant workers dependence on their families and husbands, and also enhance their economic security and say in the household decisions. It also affects them in how they have the ability to decide for their own development (UNRISD 2005, 68).

4.5 Gendered mobility and remittances

Just as mobility and migration are gendered (Piper 2008), so is the way remittances are sent. Incidentally, these gendered remittances are shaped by the social gender roles as women tend to obtain more feminine characteristics such as empathy, caring and considerate for others (Blackstone 2003, Mikkola 2008, Peterson 2004). According to Maimbo and Ratha (2005), remittances are essential for low-income countries for consumption for recipients households as they are a source of income (Maimbo and Ratha 2005, 22, 26). Remittances as an essential part of a migration, Rahman and Fee (2014) opined that remittances are the basic motivation for which people migrate. It also refers to the transfers of money or goods to their families in their home country by a migrant working outside of their origin countries. As mentioned earlier, remittances are gendered thus, women migrant workers made up about half percent of all international migrants and are increasingly supporting their families through remittances. According to Lopez-Ekra et al. (2011), remittances represent the second largest source of external funding for developing countries and has thus been recognised by governments and international organisations as being an integral part of reducing household poverty and enhancing local development (Lopez-Ekra et al. 2011, 69).

According to Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman (2017), financial remittances from migrant workers constitutes roughly 580 billion US dollars in 2015 which increases with 9.9 percent since 2010 (Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman 2017, 10). However, remittances can go unnoticed depending on the channel through which they are transferred. Maimbo and Ratha (2005) emphasis on how the delivery mechanisms for sending home remittances can be informal, i.e. through unrecorded channels (Maimbo and Ratha 2005, 3). If send through a formal channel, official channels such as banks or other money transfer organisations such as Western Union or Riya are used. On the contrary, informal remittances are sent through an unofficial channel such as private couriers, friends, family, or the migrants themselves (Maphosa 2007, 124). Moreover, most migrants are likely to use the informal channel as they are more likely to avoid extra fees or are unable to use the official channel as they entered the country through an unofficial channel. Though the practice of sending cash or money is common, it is also common for migrants to bring home goods or non-food remittances such as a sack of rice, a square tin¹¹ of oil, second-hand clothes, skills, or other technological knowledge in most developing countries. Regardless, the remittance flows to developing countries declined

¹¹ A metal tin with a dimension of 240x240x380.

by 2.4 percent to 429 billion US dollars in 2016 and is expected to grow at about 3.3 percent in 2017, to 444 billion US dollars (World Bank 2018). Nevertheless, the flow of remittances between the South-South countries account for nearly 30 per cent of global remittances from developing countries to other developing countries (Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman 2017, 13).

The increasing flow of financial remittances shows that it has become major motive or push and pull drivers of labour migration in developing countries, and additionally women migrant workers play an active role as agents of development with their increasing contribution in the context of remittances. However, the practice of remitting goods and money can be influenced by social norms and cultural expectations in regards to gender, as a good remitter is often defined by the social perceptions as one who sends and respond to the demands of family members regardless of the remitter or the woman migrant worker income, employment, and security (Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman 2017, 25). Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman (2017) further stresses that these social perceptions of constructed remitter can be problematic especially for women migrant workers as they often come through an informal channel and thus, are undocumented (Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman 2017, 25).

Nevertheless, there are certain connections in how women as remittance-senders empower themselves as well to the transformation of their livelihoods in their origin country. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2013), the remitting behaviour of sending remittances are influenced by several factors such as age, gender, education, marital status, skills, nature of migration, institutional constraints and familiarities (Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman 2017, 26). It is also crucial to underpin that gender is an essential and understudied determinant of migrant remitting behaviours as these could empower women migrant workers in developing countries. Though earning less than men, research shows that women migrant workers remit more of their income than their counterpart (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2013, 1).

Accordingly, the motivations to send remittances also vary according to certain circumstances (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2013, 2). For example, women migrant workers in developing countries have the responsibility to sustain their families in their origin country and thus, may remit more. While on the contrary, women who migrate autonomously remit lesser as they have no responsibilities or no families to sustain (ibid.). Moreover, due to

the traditional and social constructed roles, women migrant workers in less developed countries are subjected to family pressure, and thus, have the feelings of responsibility towards their families and accept difficult living and working conditions such as long working hours in low-skilled sectors, physical or mental abuse by their employers (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2013, 2).

As remittance-senders, women migrant workers have attained more empowered, and participate in decision-making processes in their origin country, and not only that, they also foster empowerment and social change to those they remit (Hennebry, Holliday, and Moniruzzaman 2017, 26). Through their role as remittance-senders, women migrant workers are acknowledged as an economic provider by their families and community at home, and moreover, seen as a drive for change that challenges constructed gender roles.

4.6 The analytical framework

The process of developing an analytical framework in how mobility as a livelihood strategy for Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram is not trivial and remains a difficult task. The main purpose of the theoretical framework was to introduce the readers to my own position within the theory and in how I understand and use these theories to highlight the impact of mobility as a livelihood strategy for migrant women workers.

As the research study revolves around how women use mobility as a livelihood strategy, it is critical that gender is used as a theoretical framework. The concept of gender was stressed to distinguish the difference between sex and gender as they often are used interchangeably. It is crucial for the study to be able to distinguish how roles of women in the studied community was generated and in what ways were women coerced to find a better livelihood through their mobility. Moreover, as gender produces power differences between men and women, it is important to take into account how the disproportionate position of women in the household or community, their unequal share of obligations, and access to opportunities can cause their decisions to migrate for better livelihood opportunities. Since the everyday lives and experiences of people in how they make a living, in how they make decisions are gendered, hence, the gender approach.

During the process, I was able to understand and discover the mobility pattern and how the decision to migrate are influenced by the decision based on an individual (micro), household (meso) and changes in the political, socio-economic conditions of the country (macro). Therefore, it was essential that the concept of mobility is also used as it entails a movement to seek better opportunities and maintain their livelihood. In view of the mobility pattern undertaken by women in search for better livelihoods is gendered, I applied the feminisation of labour migration which showcased the increasing participation of women in migration and emphasised on the sacrifice and work women have to experience.

The intention of using feminisation of migration was to underline the existing exploitation of women during their migration. Through the process, I also found that the pattern and experiences of these women during their migration are also affected by the legitimacy of their migration status as in if their mobility is through a legal or illegal channel. Additionally, I also came to find that the works they have undertaken are determined by the migratory pattern and thus, is crucial to point out in the discussion. Since I wanted to look into the transformation that their mobility has contributed to their livelihoods, it was significant to look into the aspect of remittances, for instance, in how they send it to their families, i.e., what form and channel. Not the least, in how the remittances are used to maintain their livelihoods by their families. Therefore, it is essential to look in the concept of remittances and how remittances can be gendered. Nevertheless, as women tend to be affected by the growing poverty due to economic instability in the country (Chant 2008, 166-167), they are motivated to migrate for work is mostly due to the socio-economic conditions of the household and due to the absence of men. It is also important to highlight the living conditions of women migrant workers in destination country as they are easily exploited and suffer certain complications at work through their work environment, hence, the concept of feminisation of poverty is appropriate to use as I also wanted to emphasise on the women's active role in the transformation of their livelihood through their mobility.

5 FINDINGS

In order to answer the research question, the research looks at Myanmar women migrant worker's mobility and the livelihood transformation in their destination countries, which in this case is Aizawl, Mizoram, a state in the North-Eastern part of India. The study seeks to identify the challenges that they faced in their destination country during their mobility as a livelihood strategy and the contribution they have attained through their mobility in the form of livelihood transformation at a micro, meso and macro level. It further seeks to understand how their mobility is an effect of the socio-conditions of their household, how their mobility channels influence the work they have undertaken in the labour market and in what ways has mobility impact their role upon arrival and during their stay in Mizoram.

As sending remittances in the home country can impact the livelihoods of their family, I also wanted to investigate in what ways has it impacted them. The research sought to highlight and explore the individual experiences of the women through employing a feminist research methodology and by conducting interviews. The interviews with the respondents provided many personal stories and experiences of the women migrant workers, thus uncovering some social realities connected to gender and mobility. This chapter will present the result obtained from the individual interviews.

5.1 Role of Myanmar women migrant worker in Mizoram

According to the Myanmar women migrant workers, they often have to take meagre jobs that they could find to support their families. These jobs are mostly compounded in the informal sector where the wages are low, and working hours vary from 6-12 hours a day. One respondent Zaii* expressed about how she felt the need to work more and harder as the breadwinner of her family as her husband has health issues which he obtains during his imprisonment in Zebet Jail in Myanmar. Another respondent Kimi* also stresses on how being a single mom has affected her working hours, and often have to ask her sister for help with daily necessities as her salary does not cover their basic needs.

Most of the respondents have stressed that they often have to pull themselves together as they are aware of their families struggling in their origin countries. Their main motivation for working in such a stressful condition is that they see themselves as an agent for change in their community. For instance, young Myanmar women migrate in order to support their parents

and younger siblings, and also for their own future. On the other hand, the married women work so that their children can have a better future prospect than themselves. Though it initially was for their parents or siblings, the motivations for being a migrant worker changes after they are married and have children.

When asked about if their role as a woman has any impact on their work, the respondents argued that they have never thought about it as they do not have the time to think about choosing work but that they took whatever job was available. Respondent Kimi* describes her life in the quarry construction:

“When I first arrived here, I started out as a stayed-in nanny for a local lady and earned about 800 INR¹² a month. It was quite stressful as I was unable to communicate, so I moved to the quarry construction which was referred to me by my older sister. At the quarry, I had to split the rocks and was able to earn more and I do not need to have language skills to work... Although there was no division of labour at the construction, women tend to split the rocks whereas the men carry the cubic rocks for us to split and share the profit”.

Though the women are aware that the job that they have undertaken are rigorous in the quarry construction, they are determined to overcome it as they feel responsible for the families they left behind in their origin country and the families that they are taking care of in the destination country. Kimi* further explained:

“I have never thought about getting married here (destination country) as I have a family (older and younger sisters) to support back at home. But I feel more secure and safe after getting married to my husband”.

Despite the fact that Kimi* stresses on not getting married and taking on her reproductive gender role while working in Mizoram, she ended up getting married to her husband. Eventually, combined being a housewife with two small kids under the age of 10 and working in the quarry. Unfortunately, she becomes a single mother and become the main breadwinner of the family after her husband passes away due to his health conditions.

This statement shows that single women migrant workers feel more vulnerable when they migrate alone and tend to shift a family in their destination country. Albeit having a husband,

¹² The Indian currency, Indian Rupee and will henceforth be refer as INR.

they still continue to work in the informal sector and contribute economically to sustain their families. It further shows that gender still plays a significant role even in local communities, as men are still seen as superior and the breadwinners, while women are still relegated to the role of homemakers and carers. The single women migrant workers also emphasised that in the labour market there is still a gender division of labour, where men are preferred to work in factories and road constructions where the daily wage or monthly salary are higher. On the other hand, young single woman migrant worker like Thatha* adds:

“I do not think I will be working in other sectors, I am affluent with household chores, if I have the opportunity, I will learn tailoring techniques and work within that area”.

Suii*, a married respondent who first arrived in Mizoram as a single, young woman migrant worker who first arrived in 2002 and later in 2005 mentioned that when she first arrived in the destination country she started off as a caretaker, then switched to a housemaid. After trying her hands on the different work available to her, she started learning handloom and weaving and moved closer to her friends to start working together. Suii* further asserts that though it was demanding for her to work within the handloom sector, she still choose to do so as she is not pressured by employers and is not as demanding physically and mentally. Though she is married to another migrant worker, she still works at home as the income from her husband as a manager for a couple of handloom migrant workers. She also mentions that her contribution to the household income has helped improve their living conditions both in the origin and destination countries. Despite her contribution in the income unit, she still has to take care of their daughters, and her reproductive role as a caretaker and a mother has still to continue as her husband has to constantly be out for work during the day and often come home late at night.

Furthermore, the single women migrant workers stress that they prefer to work as housemaid, carer, and in the handloom industry instead of working in the ‘men’ division of labour as it is not that demanding physically. On the other hand, the married and divorced women migrant workers accentuate that it has become much easier for them to work in the so-called ‘male’ division of labour, as they are not required to report to anybody and can work according to their own time. Additionally, they also stress that by combining their reproductive and productive roles, it has taken a toll on them physically and mentally. During one of my interviews with Sangi* and her friends, one of her friend’s brother (also an economic migrant) who was present in the house remarks:

“Women’s responsibility is in the kitchen even if she works or earns money. We men are the breadwinners of the family and have been working outside for our livelihoods. The duty of women is to have our dinner ready and hot water for our bath”.

The remarks made by the friend’s brother showed that women’s role in the productive force is devalued as in nature and that their household reproductive chores are not appreciated and seen as a given, whereas men’s contribution to housework is not considered to be an essential role for the male. Moreover, there are many Myanmar migrant women workers who have decided to settle down in Mizoram as they either are married to local men or their children have been more integrated with the local society through their schooling, church activities, and has been born and raised in Mizoram. Many of these Myanmar women work in the market as greengrocers or own their own small convenience store while they still run home to make dinners and attend to the family needs.

According to Liani*, present President of Myanmar women organisation, Women’s League of Chinland (WLC), many women migrant’s workers are daily labourers selling local eateries in the street or market, or as a wholesale goods distributor and increasingly participating in the economic development of destination country. Although some of the respondents have mentioned that they have visited their country of origin yearly during the holidays, they still feel like they are a part of their old community and at the same a huge contributor to the transformation of livelihoods for their relatives and families in the origin country. When asked if they will have the same opportunities if they go back home, respondents like Kimi*, Zaii*, Suii* point out that they would prefer to work and earn a living in Mizoram as jobs are scarce in Myanmar. They also mention that they do not know what they will work with and if they will be able to earn the same way in the home country. I also happened to have met second-generation Myanmar women workers and see that most of them are able to work in the formal sector in contrast to the first generation of migrants as they were able to attend university and acquired the needed qualifications and technical skills for the job, unlike their parents or other relatives.

Many of these second-generation Myanmar women workers are still following their pre-assigned gender roles although they have been integrated into the society and are fairly independent. This is so because Mizoram is a state where culture and traditions are preserved so is the gender roles. Besides, the new women migrant workers are also first and foremost

influenced by the independence of these second-generation women and are willing to sacrifice their time and youth to achieve their own independence from the cultural and traditional strains of gender roles.

5.2 “I paid the brokerage fee to the broker”

In Mizoram, most of the Myanmar migrant workers enter the country through the two border crossing points between India and Myanmar, namely Zokhawthar and Faltlang. These two crossing points are the only major routes to enter Mizoram from Myanmar that is more safe and secure than a route from Moreh, a town in Manipur. On contrary to Zokhawthar and Faltlang, security officers patrolling in Moreh are more meticulous in checking identifications and in questioning people moving in and out of the countries, and thus, is avoided by the people who migrate for work. However, in Zokhawthar and Faltlang the security details are more tedious in either side of the border as these crossing points are unfenced there is also a lot of informal trade and informal entry which is happening in the area.

Many Myanmar migrants entering India for work are likely to use an informal route to save money, as many of the migrants are from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, their main motivation to cross the borders are for work and money and are likely to save any unnecessary spending involved. Single women migrating for work often followed a broker who they paid or their friends and relatives who are familiar with the route. After arriving in the destination port, they often work in the small villages to further fund their travel to the city where job opportunities are slightly better than in the first port of destination. On the other hand, married women often followed their husbands or often migrate alone to minimise the risks involved such as costs and challenges.

Though the decisions to migrate is often taken mostly by the parents, the older siblings or as a joint decision between married couples to support the family, the women are put in the charge of a local broker who they often paid a brokerage fee of about 500-1000 INR¹³ or other friends and relatives who have experience work migration. One respondent Sangi* recalled the day she started her journey:

¹³ Approx. between 59.5 – 119 NOK with the currency exchange of 1 NOK=119 INR.

“We did not have enough money, so my parents had to lend some from our neighbours and they promised the broker that the fee would be paid back after I arrived in Mizoram and landing a job... it was easy because everyone in our community knows each other”.

“My whole family is a farmer, working for others on their farms and the income from it does not cover for the family...”.

The findings imply that most of these women migrate and are willing to pay a brokerage fee as a form of investment for bettering their livelihoods. After arriving in their destination country, they often passed through the bordering districts and arrived in Aizawl district where they meet up with other acquaintances. Moreover, there often are already family relatives living and working in the destination country, where the newly arrived migrants have a place to stay while they are looking for jobs and trying out available vacant jobs. Although having contrasting upbringing, most of the respondents recalled how their families scrape together the money to fund their travel by selling their livestock which they have been saving it for dire situations. On the other hand, if they are unable to pay for broker's fee, the interest rate increases which they have to pay off and usually take between three to 6 months before being able to send remittances.

Some of the respondents mentioned how they know other migrant workers who are caught and send back to Myanmar but return several times to Mizoram for work. On the other hand, one of the respondent Siannu*, mention that she left for Mizoram when her parents did not agree to her decisions to migrate for work. She mentioned that how she at first persuaded her family to agree to her decisions to migrate for work, however, was discouraged. And one of the reasons for their discouragement was due to the shortage of money for her travel and for their daily needs, as well another discouragement for her to migrate for work alone was that she was the youngest of her siblings. So unknown to her parents, she secretly borrowed some money from one of her friend (who has been working as a seasonal migrant) to fund her travel expense. According to the respondent, it took her two months to pay her back as she had to make a living and send some remittances to her family. Though prior approval was not taken from her parents before she ran off, her decision to be a mobile worker was later accepted after her first visit as she started to bring in more income for the family.

As Siannu*, Thatha* also did not plan on travelling to Mizoram for work and secretly joins her friends. On their way to Mizoram, she stated that she did not experience problems but since there was no security patrol at the police post in Zokhawthar, she entered without registering

herself along with her friends. Most of the other respondents have taken the approval of their parents before they started out their journey as a migrant worker. As a result, their travel expenditure was often a collective decision to borrow from their relatives or brokers which then become a collective responsibility to pay it back. Since most of the respondents either used a broker or followed their relatives when entering the destination country, they automatically become an illegal migrant as they do not obtain the needed the documents when entering the country. As such most work migrants from Myanmar entering their destination countries in an informal way, thus, are likely an *'illegal migrant worker'*. Many of the respondents expressed that they choose to remain invisible or under the spotlight as they did not want other locals or migrants to learn of their illegal migrant status. Besides, when there are criminal activities in the destination countries, it is often the migrant workers who often are indicted for the crimes. Thus, their main reason to remain invisible is due to fear of conflict with the locals, and also for fear of losing their work.

Withal, the findings further suggest that the women seem to stress that when criminal activities in the destination countries occur, migrants, in general, are likely to blame due to their illegal migrant status and thus, are interacting and integrating at a smaller pace with the local for fear of persecution which occurred in the early 2000s. According to respondents, their work in the informal sector is also easily influenced by the informal channel route they have undertaken as they have no documents, no relevant experience with work, and are often victimised in the form of low paid jobs and long working hours. Thus, limiting their potential to a better quality of livelihood.

5.3 Working in the informal sector

After arriving in the destination countries, most of the respondents stayed with their relatives or friends while looking for a work. Since the respondents are not familiar with the know-how of how society in Mizoram works, they took up available work in farms, construction sites, caretaker, a greengrocer in the local market or often end up as a day labourer with employers of their relatives. In most cases, women are more likely to find jobs as a caretaker or traditional handloom weaver as they have more nimble hands and are more willing to work than men.

“It is not easy to find a decent job here, as I do not have the qualification to work in an office. However, it is a lot better than engaging in our neighbour’s rice paddy fields back at home. I

have a chance to work in the different field than the rice fields, and I can earn almost triple the amount I earned by working here”.

Many of the women first enter employment through their contacts who would put in good words for them to their employer although the wage is lower than average. As their main motivation of migrating is to pervade the growing poverty, lack of employment, success stories of women who had gone before, and low family income, thus, they would take up the offers and helps from their associates. Respondents like Zaii*, Kimi*, and Suii* started off as caretakers, however, due to the limited work available for them in other informal sectors due to their age factor, they resort to the present work they have which are quarry rock splitters and a private handloom weaver. Besides working as a domestic worker or carer for the locals can be demanding as they have to adhere to the employer's certain practices and limit their own free time.

According to Mawite*, a local NGO worker states that through the free health services that they give to migrants, they have discovered that there is a decent amount of young Myanmar women migrants working as a prostitute in Aizawl (the study site), and various other districts in Mizoram. For many of the migrant women working in this kind of informal work, it is often that they are coerced as a result of a parent being sick or are trafficked particularly for this kind of work.

In Mizoram, the respondents expressed that they are often overworked, and their work often have strain their health which in turn can get them fired from their work. Although working in the informal sector has brought decent income to these women migrant workers in comparison to their wage in Myanmar, it is far from a decent work as it is characterised by the long working hours, low wages, and are not protected by labour laws. Moreover, there are also cases where the respondents mentioned about knowing other migrant workers who are in fear of their employers as they might get sacked if they return an hour late from Church service. This finding shows that though some women migrant workers are treated fairly good, some still experience exploitation and are in constant fear of losing their job and deported if reported to the police.

The young women respondents further expressed that though they are working as a caretaker, housemaid, and in the handloom industry, they still are looking for better job opportunities and are challenging themselves to learn new skills.

“I do not have the money and time to learn new skills, that is why I ask my employer to give me some free time on Saturday when the children are home so that I can learn to tailor at a nearby shop”.

This particular respondent, Siannu* further explains that she does not have any prior experience in caretaking except for the experiences she had gained back at home with her family.

She voices that she had a hard time the first year working as a caretaker as she

did not understand the local language, in addition to not having work experience. And since she did not have a higher educational background and her illegal migrant status, she stated that she endured the years that she works and is now better acquainted and feel more familiar with her employers. Most of the single migrant workers also expressed that they feel frustrated during the first two years but feel closer to their employers more than ever. On average, the findings show that a caretaker or housemaid earn about 3000-5000 INR¹⁴ a month including food and housing.



Figure 5 Houses made of corrugated iron/tin where handloom workers are residing.

Figure 6 Still picture of a woman using her frame loom.



Women migrant workers working in the handloom sector are also facing hardship as they have to endure the long working hours, and deadlines in order to meet their ends. As they also have children to take care of, they have the children school hours and late night to work on their piece. They also added how working in the informal sector have its own advantages and disadvantages. For instance, if they have employers, the employers already have a set of price list for per weave piece and the pay depends on the worker's

¹⁴ Equivalent to 355.5 NOK to 592.5 NOK (XE Currency Converter 2018).

efforts. Additionally, they have to live together in a house made of corrugated iron or a tin with 15-20 workers and are managed by a manager (see figure 5). If they are self-employed with the weaving machine at home, they have to negotiate the price of the weave piece with the buyers which can be a higher price than working for somebody and negotiate the timeframe, additionally,



Figure 7 Housing and working conditions.

they workers decide on the working hours and how many pieces they weave. As the price varies according to the weaving pattern of a piece, the wage of a handloom worker for a week amounts to approximately 500-1500 INR equivalent to 60-187 NOK¹⁵. However, while working privately has its own advantages, it also has disadvantages. Another respondent, a divorcee by the name of Nunui* revealed that she has to buy all the basic necessary items like yarns, extra bobbins, and shuttle which makes it hard for her to earn a decent wage since she also had to take care of her children.

Some of the respondents work in the quarry after working as maid and caretaker. According to them, the working conditions in the quarries is tough in comparison to working as maid or caretaker, and they constantly have to exert themselves. They hint that working in quarries with acquaintances and friends from their village helps them motivate to work in the environment although it is not suitable for their health conditions.

Since their entry in the destination country is mainly through an illegal channel, they often faced economic exploitation as well mental and physical violence, verbal abuse from their employers or locals. Out of the 16 respondents, 6-7 respondents also stated that working in the informal sector is nothing compared to the verbal abuse they undergo. They emphasised that through the verbal abuse, for instance, through the use of ethnic slurs like ‘*Damn Burmese*’¹⁶, ‘*you cannot do anything properly*’ or ‘*you are not good in anything*’. To the women migrant workers, they

¹⁵ XE Currency Converter (2018).

¹⁶ This particular slur is a direct translation of the word ‘*Burma ho*’ which basically denote ethnic slurs and how the Myanmarese are not good enough. I used the term Burmese as I wanted to reproduce the same effect.



Figure 8 Woman migrant worker splitting rock.

suffer more for a longer period of time by the verbal abuse as it constantly reminds them that they are no good enough even to work in the informal sectors.

Most of the women arguably are underpaid and undervalued of their work, and as mentioned are more vulnerable due to their gender differences. For instance, they often are

isolated at their work by their employers as they are restricted to move without prior permission and if they are to move, they often will be given a warning or cut their salary. During one of my visits, it was noticeable that the employers were not so fond of having relatives or acquaintances of the women migrant workers over during their free time.

“I am sorry I won’t be able to talk to you freely. It is supposedly my free time (tea time), I have to start preparing dinner or the missus will not be happy”.

This can indicate that the women working in the informal sector are limited to have their own free time and are insecure about their jobs as they can be easily replaced by another migrant worker at a lower wage. Thus, are trying to win favours by not having a social life outside of their work. Some of the single migrant workers were aware of how their free time is limited even on Sundays. For instance, while having an interview with the younger respondents Sangi*, Siannu*, Thatha*, and Suite* on a Sunday, they asked if we could sneak out of Church during the service so that the interviews can be done early as they are expected to return back on time after the Church service.



Figure 9 House made of bamboo where migrant workers reside.

Some respondents working in the quarry further mentioned that their earnings or salary depends on how many tins of rock each worker is able to split. In this case, a tin referred to an 18L square metal container oil tin with a dimension of 240x240x380. In the early 2000s, they earned about 30 INR per tin of split rocks which is equivalent to around 3.50 NOK, however, due to the recent increase in lack of work and demand, the rate per tin of split rocks has decreased to 10 INR which is equivalent to 1.1 NOK. According to the respondents, a hard-working person can split up to 30 tins of rocks and can earn about 300 INR a day which is equivalent to 37 NOK, and approximately about 9000 INR, equivalent to 1066.3 NOK a month if they are working without any breaks in between. This has affected their livelihood both in the destination and origin countries. When talked to the manager, the manager mentioned that since

Figure 10 Cubic rocks and working site.



the cost of cubic rocks have increased, it has become increasingly hard for them to provide a stable pay to the workers. Also considering the increase of unemployment in the origin country, the local women and migrants have to work with whatever work was available, even with a low pay in the informal sector. During one of my fieldwork, I found that the women migrant workers were co-working in the same tent and were even helping out each other to fill the tins.

During an interview, Zaii* a married respondent agonises how working as a rock splitter and welding a rock hammer constantly has formed calluses on her hands, and even has chronic back pain that has affected her life. Kimi* who was also on the construction site also revealed that as the main source of income in her family of three, she had to multitask between home and work. She argued that she has had health issues after her last child but continue to work as a rock splitter as her husband has passed away a year ago. When asked why not work as a day carer, she mentioned that although she would like to, her two children of under 10 years old will be left all alone and could not, therefore, participate in the work she desired. Moreover, she further mentioned that she had only had time to work when her children are off to school and her sisters to lean onto when she works to care over for her children. Thus, limiting her time to work and earn enough for both her and her children.

5.4 Sending remittances and transforming livelihoods

For Myanmar migrant women in Mizoram, sending remittances is a crucial way to sustain their families and communities. Since they came to the destination countries with deficit finances, they are often unable to send remittances to their families the first few months as they have to pay off their borrowed money. However, after joining the labour market, they are able to earn money and send remittances home. On the contrary, there are also some migrants who are unable to send remittances as they remain unemployed in the destination country. One respondent describes how sending remittances have been a major motivation for her enduring her work in destination when in fact, she would like to study theology and become a pastor or an evangelist.

“I send money to my parents two to three times a year through friends and relatives. The third time usually is Christmas time and I am allowed to travel back home during Christmas, so I usually bring home the money I have saved for 3 months or so... I do not buy clothes or make-up for myself, my employers often give me their hand me down. I rather save them than spend it on these things”.

During this interview, the other respondents also contribute that if they are unable to go home during Christmas, they also send it to the person who gets to go home amongst them as they trust each other more than others. Another respondent who also have a younger brother working in a local noodle factory mentioned, *“My brother does not save money like me. He spends mostly on clothes and electronic items. I thought he would be more responsible after seeing how hard it is to make a living, but he never contributes when I send money”.* When asked this particular respondent, if sending remittances have contributed to any transformation for her own, her parents and family, she concurred that sending remittances has bettered the livelihoods of her family as they are able to take care of her younger siblings without the need for strenuous work. She further asserts that since she was a drop out, she did not want her younger siblings to dropout and thus, is able to afford their school fees. According to the respondent, her younger siblings going to school is an investment for the family as they can later work in formal jobs unlike her.

The findings further imply that most of the remittances money are handed by the caretaker of the family, that is often the mother. In case of absent parents, it is often the person left behind which is some younger or older siblings that take care of the remittance money. Though they stressed that remittances are spent on the basic daily necessities of the family, it often comes to food, clothing, and health expenditures. Some of the younger respondents emphasised that they

have asked their parents to save some of the remittances send as they would also like to continue studying. Nonetheless, most of the respondents have admitted that they felt more empowered after being capable of sending remittances to their families. During the interview process, some were not familiar with the word ‘empower’, we had contextualised it into ‘*the feeling of being capable*’, or ‘*the feeling of being strong*’ so that the respondents will be able to understand comprehend it.

When asked if they have ever brought home non-cash remittances or are just sending monetary remittances, one respondent Zaii* claimed that when she visited her in-laws in Myanmar during Christmas season, she brought home cash and non-cash as gifts for her in-laws. She further asserts that she felt sorry for her in-laws as she was unable to send them more. When asked how the cash remittances were used or if she had any idea how it was spent, I hereby quote, “*I do not know how they spend money since I do not live with them and I rarely see them. I hope they buy a sack of rice as it will last them for a while*”. As mentioned earlier, some of the respondents claim that the remittances they send are used for buying daily necessities, or as a source of income for households. It was also mentioned that some of the families invest in livestock as they can generate income through milk and meat, while other use the remittances for investment in agricultural production as buying of an acre of land, seeds, fertiliser, and so on.

One respondent Kimi* mentioned how remittances from her two older sisters during the late 1990s were first used to pay off the debts they have accumulated after the demise of their mother as the income of her father as a government teacher was no longer sufficient for her younger sister and herself. Further, she added that they started buying and planting seeds so that they can sell it at the farmer’s market to generate some income. After the demise of her father, she decided to join her sisters in Mizoram as a labourer in the informal sector so that she can help her sister get her higher education.

Most of the respondents have admitted transferring of non-cash remittances when they visit home to show to neighbours that they can now afford necessities which in turn influence young girls from the village to migrate for work. Though one can see the changes made from the use of remittances, it has also empowered the women migrant workers themselves, thus allowing them to be more independent, without the need to adhere to the traditional and cultural roles. One married respondent mentioned how she started working as a greengrocer selling door to

door to sustain her parents and siblings when she first arrived in the destination country. Later after marrying her husband, who works as a day labourer, she felt the urgency to work as his income was not sufficient for the family. Thus, she resumed working in the handloom industry and worked privately without managers to supervise her and is now the main breadwinner of the family. When asked if she feel any changes in regard to their livelihoods and herself, she replied,

“I feel more empowered than ever. I never thought I will be able to be the main breadwinner of the family. Still, I do not want to admit it in front of my husband as he might feel less capable and might end up in depression as he has no job these days. After I started working again, I was able to afford tuition fees (school fees) for my children and we are never in shortage of money where we have to borrow from families, but I am not sure what the future holds, I still have one child who is almost of age to go to school... I just feel like we will make it through again if God is willing”.

This statement shows that when women migrant workers are employed, they feel more empowered as they see themselves in a new light as being equal, however, they bluntly refused to admit in front of their spouse as they still feel like the husband needs to be the man of the house. On the other hand, when women migrants are unemployed or are dismissed from their work, they often have to resort to working in other informal sectors to be able to send remittances, for example, as a day caretaker. If unable to send remittances due to unemployment, the families in origin countries are strongly expectant of it and often resort to borrowing from other families which in turn have a vicious cycle of debt and repayment.

5.5 Negative impacts of women’s mobility in origin country

Though there are positive aspects of women’s mobility for work, there is also some negative impact from it. For instance, some of the respondents describe that after returning to their village, many of the villagers see them as a bad influencer to the young adults as they assumed that they are motivating the young adults to chase after a modern lifestyle. Moreover, as they have more control of their life than before, the men in the village are unwilling to commit to them for marriage as they see them as strong-willed women and can leave them without authority in the household. In the household arena, the women’s position rising over in the decision-making power and control over household finances worsens their eligibility in the marriage market as well in the community. Thus, many of the remaining migrant women tend to remain as an old maid after returning back home and become the prime caretaker of the whole family. Out from the findings, the young women migrants are finding it hard to find

suitable men of their age for marriage and have insisted of finding a partner who has experienced migration before and is familiar with strong-willed women.

According to the respondents, women migrant workers with children often have to leave home and their children in the care of their grandparent/s or relatives, without seeing their children growing up as earning an income become a major household income. One particular respondent describes how she had a hard time bonding with her son after she was constantly away for almost two years. When asked about how her son is coping with her absence, she mentions that she wants to be with her son and see him grow up, but her absence would mean that she can afford to buy him his needs like education, health, food, and a shelter above his head. As a migrant worker, women with children became alienated from their offspring's and can lead to the children ended up in a bad environment.

On the other hand, the young women migrant's respondents feel that they lack the social skills when they return home and are unable to communicate with their friends as motor skills and knowledge that they have acquired from the destination countries differs and thereby, often have a complex interaction with their peers. Furthermore, the young women complained about how their roles in the family have not changed in terms of getting an assist in their reproductive chores from their brothers, husband, or father, although they are the main breadwinner of the family. For instance, they still are the girls of the family, and the brothers often have birth-right to the family's house, and in the absence of a brother, it is often the oldest sister. Though gender roles have slightly reversed and live in the origin country is affected by the mobility of the women worker, there still are families that are against changes and transformation which can deter the development and participation of women in the economic development.

5.6 Summary

This section will summarise the overall findings of the research study. The findings show that Myanmar women migrant workers are still continuing their reproductive roles in Mizoram even when entering the informal labour market. Many of these women migrant workers struggle between work and their household chores as they have to maintain their livelihood both in destination and origin countries. The findings also show that Myanmar women migrant workers are highly concentrated in the informal work and are largely affect by the channel they undertook during their migration. Their mobility pattern is depended on the socio-economic

conditions of the individual, household and the impact of the country's economy on their livelihood. According to the findings, most of the women migrant workers are labelled as '*illegal*' migrant as they did not obtain documents or registered themselves at the cross-border checkpoint. For this purpose, they use brokers who will charge them for about 1000 INR which is equivalent to 120 NOK depending on the exchange rate. Though many families are not able to afford it, they will either borrow it from friends or scrape it together by selling their livestock's as they see it as a form of future investments.

The findings show that the decisions to migrate is taken by individuals who are motivated to find better opportunities in the form of employment, better wage, and also to sustain their lifestyles or they are compelled to use mobility as livelihood strategy by the changing political, social and economic changes. On the other hand, some migrants stated that the decisions to migrate are undertaken by the family and thus, have to abide by it as they also want to take responsibility for the livelihood of their families. The women migrant workers are mostly employed in the informal sector as day labourers, housemaids, caretakers and au pairs. The findings imply that the women migrant workers tend to be overwork, and as a result often have health consequences which also hampers their ability to send remittances as they have spent their earnings on treatments.

Myanmar women migrant workers expressed that they have to endure the long working hours at a lower wage as it is the only way they can sustain their livelihoods and is better than working in the farms and barely earning enough for a day's meal in their origin countries. Those working in the handloom sectors were paid on the basis of a piece by piece or the weaving pattern where the prices are pre-fixed ranging from 500-1500 INR which is equivalent to 60-187 NOK. The findings also show that some women migrant workers in the handloom sector first started out as housemaids and caretakers, and eventually changed their jobs where they lived together with a group of 15-20 migrant workers in a small space. The data shows that women migrant workers in the informal sector can earn about 3000 INR to 9000 INR which is equivalent to 355.5 NOK to 1066.3 NOK a month depending on their kind of work.

The earnings from their work are then sent to their families in origin country which is used to buy necessities and improve their livelihoods. Since it costs to remit money through a formal channel, they send it through their friends or relatives, or bring it home themselves during their yearly visits. For many of their families, these remittances provide an opportunity to pay off

their debts, invest in the education for their siblings, buy livestock and agricultural products for generating extra income to sustain the family. Non-cash remittances are also sent in the form of a sack of rice, sugar, canned oil or canned meats. These non-cash remittances are as essential as they are the daily needs that can be used straight away. The findings also show that the women migrants feel like they are more capable than ever after being able to earn and support their families. However, their mobility also has negative impacts on their origin country as they tend to acquire certain social skills and knowledge, they feel like they no longer are part of the community. Though eligible, men and the old generation sees them as strong-willed women with authority in the household which can hinder them from participating in the marriage market.

6 DISCUSSION

As the former chapter present the findings during the fieldwork data in Mizoram, their role as woman migrant workers, their migration channels, how women migrant workers are concentrated in the informal sector, the challenges they experience upon their arrival and during their stay in Mizoram. The kind of livelihood transformations they have obtained for themselves and their families through their mobility in the form of remittances and further present the negative impact women's mobility has on their country of origin. This chapter will discuss the findings and use the theoretical and analytical framework as a background to analyse the findings.

6.1 Causes and challenges of women's mobility

Migration occurs as a result of the various determinant factors in both destination and origin states or countries. In most developing countries, labour migration is an integral part of development as it provides migrants the opportunity to maintain their livelihoods (Castles 2009, 444). Though it is reasonable to understand that people migrate for better livelihood opportunities such as finding jobs, higher wages, freedom or security, there are others who are involuntarily forced to migrate, for instance, due to war or conflicts. Migration also occurs as a result of an individual decision to migrate so that they can afford clothes, new phones, and so on. On the other hand, it can also occur as a collective decision undertaken with families or also due to the contrasting socio-economic conditions of the family or the macroeconomic issues of the country. De Haas (2010, 5) argued that migrant as an individual is a rational actor and capable of making his/her own decision and move on basis of the cost-effective calculation at a micro level. And on the other hand, migration on the meso level is based more on how migration is no longer an individual decision but is a decision undertaken collectively on the household level with families or other closed relatives. At the macro level, migration can also occur due to a direct effect of differentials in employment and income opportunities.

In general, the reasons for migration are similar between men and women, most migrate to find work, to get an education, or to flee persecution. People mostly migrate also due to the oppression of gender norms and expectation, the unequal power relations that exist in each tradition and culture, and in every society and in different forms. Though the causes for migration can be similar between men and women, there are other unequal factors leading to women's migration such as poverty, unequal access to resources, or the unequal power

dynamics relating to gender roles and decision-making power. Women migrant workers also have less decision-making power than men when taking a decision to migrate, as women tend to lack an autonomous power due to the influence of traditional and cultural gender norms and practices. This shows that migration is gendered and the decisions to migrate are also affected by the choices made by either men or women (Fay 2008). These factors can affect the way in which women experience migration upon their arrival and during their stay in the destination country. In order to have a better understanding of the causes and challenges of women's mobility as a livelihood strategy, it is important to look into the causes of migration at three different stages, the individual (micro), the collective (meso), and the national (macro) level.

6.1.1 Micro-Level

Most of the Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram are mostly single young women in their early 20s and 30s. These young women often are influenced by the success stories of their friends or other migrants and are motivated to make a better future for themselves. Though some young women are driven to migrate to earn for their future, there are some who are motivated to migrate primarily to support their families. Moreover, many young women often want to escape from the suppression of their gender roles by the patriarchal gender norms and traditions. Therefore, migrating for work become a good opportunity to escape and to redefine their own lives. For example, young women like Siannu* and Thatha* migrate for their own future and wants to earn their own money. However, in the process of doing so, they secretly followed their friends and still feel guilty for not taking the consent of their parents first. As the only migrant in the family, their own decision to migrate was mostly motivated by their will in becoming more independent from gender norms. They are also motivated highly as they wanted to be able to support their parents and thus, send remittances to help decrease the burden on their families. Nevertheless, single young women tend to save aside some money for their own future so that they can be less burdensome for their families. Coming from a patriarchal society, young single women often have less autonomy and decision-making power in the family. However, present-day young women are no longer intimidate by the traditional gender norms and roles and are willing to risk more for their own future.

Married women, on the other hand, migrate primarily for the future of their children and their family. As the main household non-paid caretaker of the family, they often are burden by the lack of income, scarcity of employment and the financial responsibilities since most married women in Myanmar manages the total income of the family. In contrast to the young single

women, they have better decision-making power and autonomy, and since they are the ones who notice the needs of the family members, they are highly motivated to earn extra income by migrating to neighbouring countries.

Women's gender role in Myanmar is a prominent factor in their mobility for work in other countries. As a developing country, employment in Myanmar is scarce in the formal sector, even so in the informal sector at an alarming rate. Therefore, many women migrate for mainly economic purposes to change their living conditions and to be able to afford a better future for their children. Though the conditions of women in Myanmar has been better and preferable during the last few years, it only has applied mostly to women in urban areas as they have better access to the resources need to enter labour market than women in rural areas. Unfortunately for women in rural areas, this does not apply to them as they do not have the same extent of access to the required or basic resources, and thus are more prone to experiencing migration for work at a larger rate, and this may be due to their need to break away from the patriarchal stronghold.

As mentioned in section 4.1, the role of women and men are predetermined due to their socially constructed gender roles, hence, the norms of women's role are expected to consist of reproductive work, for instance, tending to children, housework, and other unpaid domestic work. Though gender roles and norms differ from state to state, the respondents came from different background, status, and economic background and thus, experiences gender in a different way. For instance, gender roles in Chin State, Shan State, Kayin State, and the different states of Myanmar differ as there are also different ethnicity that practices contrasting cultural and traditional gender norms (Thein 2015).

The younger women migrants were motivated to migrate mostly by the success stories of their friends, for wanting to be independent, and because of the scarcity of employment in their country of origin. On the other hand, the older women are motivated mostly due to the socio-economic conditions of their family, absent of working men in the family, and also lack of employment. However, both young and old women are still migrating to become more independent from the patriarchal society that has depreciate and detriment their role as a mother, caretaker, and a woman. Most of the respondents mentioned that they come from a big family of between 6-10, wherein one case the youngest of the siblings was still a toddler when she migrates. With too many mouths to feed, the parents often are unable to provide for their

children, thus, the elder children have to either drop out of school to take up menial jobs in the neighbour's farms or work as a daily labourer to contribute to the family needs. However, as work in Myanmar depends on the season and often for a short period of time, it is not sufficient for a whole family to survive by. Thus, migrating for work become a cost-effective investment for struggling poor families even if it means that they have to part with their daughters or wives for a few months or years.

According to the findings, most of the women migrant workers started out from menial household chores like babysitting, cooking and further work in farms of relatives or close family friends where the pay is often insufficient. Most of the women interviewed have similar background stories where either one of the parents is demised or is incapable of working due to sickness, and thus, have to take responsibility for their families even though they themselves are young. They further mentioned that since they know hardship at a young age, they are more tolerant of the harsh environment of work migration. Nevertheless, woman migrant worker like Mangi* who made her own decision to migrate for work started when she drops out of school after 4th Grade as her parents were not supportive of her getting an education and prefer someone who could contribute at home. According to her, it was the best decisions she had undertaken without the influence of her parents and is extremely proud of how far she had come as she now owns a frame handloom which often is hard to afford for migrant women.

Respondent like Sangi*, Siannu*, Thatha*, and Suite* are young women migrant workers who are affected by the gender norms that regulated their daily life. Moreover, as the eldest of the siblings, it automatically becomes their responsibility to take care of their young siblings. Their experiences with migration are also shaped by gender as men also have migration experience which differs from women. All in all, women's migration is also affected how severely they are affected by how gender shape their lives and the economic instability which widens the gap of poverty between men and women. Since many of the women who migrate are often in dire poverty and the only way to end the vicious cycle is often through work in another destination countries.

6.1.2 Meso-Level

Though young migrant women are capable of making a decision to migrate for work, they often take decisions collectively with their family member as a household strategy to maximise the income but also minimise the risks for the members of the family (Oishi 2002, 6). This is done

so for the well-being of the family where it is either the mother or the daughter who is sent to countries where there is work available. Women, in general, do not migrate because of economic motives, but oftentimes due to the socio-economic conditions of the family. As such migration is the effect of the poor socio-economic conditions of women, children, and their families. When decisions to migrate are finalised, the burden for the travel cost is shared between the family members.

For instance, in the case of respondent Zaii*, the decisions to migrate was undertaken collectively by herself and brother to support their families. Though she works at neighbour's farms, it was never enough to make their ends meet, hence, their decision was affected by their poor living conditions. Another example is Kimi* who became the sole earner of the household after the demise of her father and since her sisters were already in Mizoram. Even though her older sister sent her remittances, it was still not enough to make ends meet as she also had an older sister who needed medical care and a younger sister who was a high school student. The decisions to migrate was collectively taken together though she only cooperates and was willing to join her older sister to make better living conditions for the family. These two examples reflect on how women are mostly affected by the socio-economic conditions such as poverty than their brothers or husbands and thus, has to take responsibility for maintaining the livelihoods of their family by migrating for work.

Migration can also be influenced by migrant networks which is "*a set of interpersonal ties that connect all sorts of migrants both in origin and destination areas*" (Massey et al. 1993, 454). For example, the network of Myanmar women migrant workers consists of friends or relatives living in the destination country. Their networks often influenced in how the women migrate as the way in which women migrate differs than men and are seen as risky and that women are more vulnerable. The findings also indicate that after collective decisions are taken, the families place their daughters or wives in the hands of close family friends or relatives, mainly men, so that they can be protected under their migration. It is important to underline that Myanmar women migrant workers are also utilising their network which connects them with other migrants, non-migrants or former migrants both in destination and origin countries to so that they can lower the costs and risks that are involved in the movement, and thus, increases the net returns.

The findings also indicate that majority of the women migrants uses their network during their migration and when first arriving in destination countries. They often stayed together with these other migrants to minimise the risks and costs involved while looking for a place to work. Moreover, through other migrants, they are able to find information and find potential work.

6.1.3 Macro-Level

Though women migrate for their own or the household decisions, these decisions are affected by the conditions of the country's changing economy, politics, demography and culture; and functions as a push and pull factors for migration. Since the shortage of supply for labour become increasingly rising in the origin country, the demand of labour in the informal sector in destination country increases proportionately. Though Myanmar is in the process of developing its human capital after decades of political isolation and economic stagnation, the country still faces a considerable amount of obstacles in building a skilled workforce as the majority of the Myanmar population, mainly from the rural area are lacking access to resources (Meganathan 2017). Most Myanmar have minimal education as they are either dropouts and less than 70 percent finished their primary education due to the socio-economic conditions of the household. Although the demand for skilled workers is high, two third of the country's population is still unable to afford required vocational training that can help them in acquiring the needed skills (Meganathan 2017).

Moreover, another motivation and triggering factor to economic migrants for migration is the wide gap of wage differentials between the origin and destination countries. As most women who migrate are mostly from a poor rural background, they are attracted and pull to the destination country for a higher wage. According to ILO (2017), Myanmar has various controversial issues regarding wages and has been increasing during the recent year. Though the minimum wage rate in Myanmar was increased to MMK3,600 per day in 2015 which is equivalent to 182.1 INR and 21.6 NOK,¹⁷ it still ranks amongst the lowest in Asia at approximately about US\$91 a month which is equivalent to 728.2 NOK (ILO 2017, 28). Nevertheless, many of these women migrants are motivated to migrate as they can earn between 3000 INR- 9000 INR¹⁸ and above as a monthly wage in India and is higher compared to that of Myanmar. Another reason is the huge demand for migrant workers in the labour market in

¹⁷ According to the exchange rate on 11th May 2018, 1 MMK=0.006 NOK.

¹⁸ 355.5 NOK to 1066.3 NOK.

destination countries and as women started joining the labour force, they are pulled by the demand of labour force which acts as a pull factor for their migration.

6.2 The pattern of Myanmar women's labour mobility

The mobility pattern of women migrants is gendered as mobility itself reinforced the invisible gender norms that are embedded on the uneven socio-political relations (Uteng 2014, 22-23). Women face more complication when migrating as well in finding work, compared to native women or men migrants. This is so because the mobility pattern of women migrants greatly depends on their social roles, autonomy, access to resources and classification of gender-oriented work in the labour market in origin country. Moreover, women migrants also relate to limited numbers of gender-associated work in the informal sector such as caretakers, housemaids, rock splitters, weavers or in other garment and textile industry as well in the formal sector.

Despite the limitations on existing data on the patterns of women migrant's migration flow in India, there are several distinct and established migration patterns. Most of the movements are mainly of the unskilled diverse ethnic¹⁹ workers from Myanmar into Mizoram. Though the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Constitution of India, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, and the Passports Act, 196, propelled the registration of an entry, stay and exit of any foreigner arriving in India. Many Myanmar women, specifically of Chin ethnicity are entering Mizoram without the required registration or are paying the patrol officers to enter, as border trade between India and Myanmar is encouraged and is mostly occurring in informally or illegally. And thus, there are many Myanmar women migrants living in Mizoram who do not own any valid legal papers (Basavapatna 2012, 65).

Though many of the women migrants enter the country through an informal channel and become automatically an illegal migrant, labour mobility provides them the opportunity for a better quality of livelihoods for themselves and their families. It is also apparent the opening of a border trade between Mizoram (India) and Myanmar, has also opened the labour market which further conditioned the inflow of Myanmar women migrants in Mizoram. Labour mobility to India has displays seasonal fluctuations where employment of economic migrants is high in

¹⁹ Mainly from the Chin State, Myanmar.

harvest and summer seasons, whereas it declines in the winter seasons when the migrant's visits their home and families.

6.2.1 Informal channel of labour mobility

Many of the Myanmar women migrants are utilising the informal channel by crossing over the trade border through Zokhawthar and Faltilang. The women migrants are often followed by men from their families or are followed by a broker through the border to the destination country and are only left until they reach houses of other migrants from their network. As mentioned in section 5.2, women migrants tend to use this sort of informal channel since it has become the cheapest and most cost-effective calculation with the expected net returns for the family or themselves.

In essence, the Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram become an illegal migrant worker as they choose to take an illegal travel route. And as most of the migrants come from a family of poor socio-economic context, they often do not have sufficient finance to cover for their travel expenses. Nonetheless, the single women migrant workers would borrow from their friends or other migrants, which they return after getting a job. On the other hand, married women migrants with families that they leave behind, the decisions to migrate are often taken collectively, thus, the money needed to cover for the travel expenses such as broker's fee is shared together, so that expected net returns can become risk-free and shared equally amongst them. It is also important to note that economic migrants do not choose to be illegal purposely, but the circumstances and conditions of their poor socio-economic are the main root cause of it. Many economic migrants do not have the luxury of being able to afford the travel expense, and some families will even put their fields or livestock as a mortgage loan to other well-off families. Therefore, by sparing a small amount of the accounted travel expenses, they are able to afford foods, rents, and other expenses while looking for a job.

Though labour mobility may benefit women through an economic empowerment as well in socio-cultural context, women migrants are more vulnerable in comparison to men migrants due to undertaking an informal channel for migration. As mention earlier, the mobility pattern is gendered and thus, the experiences of migration for women is not always safe and secure. According to International Organization for Migration (2009), women's dual vulnerability as a migrant as well being a woman can disproportionately affect the variety of risk arising from their mobility. These risks involved women migrant worker exposed to violations of their

human rights during their migration or upon arrival in the destination country through their working environment. Additionally, women migrant workers tend to deal with being marginalised as unskilled migrants and are mostly concentrated in the informal sector in work regarded as women's work as housemaids, domestic helpers, handloom weavers with lower wages than their counterparts, as well poor working conditions which further increases their health risk. Moreover, they also lack bargaining power and have fewer opportunities for establishing their own union representations which can secure them valid work contracts and securing their labour rights.

However, in the case of this study and during the interview, mostly the married women have mentioned that due to the rigorous roads and highways between the countries, and as they have to secretly be cautious of their surroundings, they experience health issues which they constantly have to go through. For instance, respondent like Zaii* mentioned that she still struggles with health complications such as urinary infections and back pain, and constantly have to take breaks when working in the quarry which results in not being able to earn enough for the month. Furthermore, by choosing to work in informal sector with low wages compared to the standard wages of their counterpart, the plight of these women respondents shows that they lack the bargaining power which is a risk of their migratory pattern.

6.2.2 Formal channel of labour mobility

In general, migrants are supposed to be registered during entry, stay and exit according to the Foreigners Act 1946 and such, however, due to many who are taking the illegal route, there are no accurate data records of how many Myanmar migrants are entering and leaving Mizoram. The formal channel of labour mobility is very limited, and many economic migrants are unable to afford the high travel expenses for documentation, visas, and registration. Basavapatna (2012) stressed that under Guideline 8(1) of the '*Temporary Stay Permit*', many of the Myanmar migrants could apply for a stay permit which would grant legalised their temporary stay and permit them to work, but this would require them to specify a sponsor who is "*a bona fide indigenous resident of Mizoram residing within 40 kilometres of the Indo-Myanmar Border*" (Basavapatna 2012, 65).

None of the migrants have other local Mizo's that they can '*trust*' or someone who is willing to be a sponsor for them, therefore, it becomes much easier for these women migrants to follow the informal channel. Moreover, women migrant workers often do not receive significant

information before their prior departure and often rely on the stories from other migrants which can deter them from registering at the cross-border towns. Since many of the women migrants have drop-out educational background, they become reluctant to share or receive any kind of information from officials. Therefore, it is important for both sending and receiving countries to promote a legal and safe migratory channel for women migrant workers. Not only that, in order to prevent the vulnerability and risks of women migrants, women's access to resources and union representation is crucial.

The labour mobility pattern of Myanmar women migrants shows that the opening of the border trade has opened and conditioned the inflow of migrant workers between the two countries. Migrants tend to follow routes that could help them save their earnings and avoid any possible detention and deportation. Therefore, it becomes much easier for these economic women migrants to enter the destination country as an illegal migrant to avoid such risks. Even so, illegal migrants especially women are more prone to the exploitative working condition due to their lack of information on the living and working conditions in destination countries. Additionally, the prevailing poverty of women is the source of increasing flow of illegal migration of women for work. On the contrary, there were also some who see their movement as legal since they have to pay fees to the brokers and the patrol officers on the borders. These findings further suggest that there is an intense occurrence of illegal activities between the borders. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that women migrants do not choose an informal or illegal migratory pattern but are forced to do so due to their household circumstances.

6.3 Challenges of mobility as a livelihood strategy for Myanmar women migrants in Mizoram

According to Ragnhild Lund in Lund et al. (2013), the notion of mobile livelihoods can vary in length and time as it depends on changing agricultural production and nation's economy. The mobility of women migrant workers itself depends on the capacity for them to create a better livelihood in their origin country, thus, their livelihood becomes mobile (Lund et al. 2013, 6). Since the movement of women migrant workers are influenced by the disproportionate power dynamics between men and women (Lund, Doneys, and Resurreccion 2015) and unequal distribution of resources, employment opportunities, and economic factors, and as imply by Lund et al., their movement itself suggest a notion of finding and creating a better livelihood.

Migrant workers from Myanmar come to Mizoram for better opportunities whereby using spatial place and practices as means of accessing to available resources and capital in their livelihood strategies (Lund et al. 2013, 7). The notion of mobile livelihood entails differentiated experiences as certain practices are involved as well social relations such as the migrant networks, to make a better life transformation (Olwig and Sorensen 2003, 10). Mobile women migrant workers tend to experience various complications when finding and creating a better livelihood opportunity than their counterparts as they are limited to certain types of work, long working hours, low wage and under-representation of women in the economic development of the country.

As mentioned earlier, women in the rural area of Myanmar are strongly tied to their gendered reproductive responsibility and whereas men are responsible for productive responsibility. Women as the minorities of the population are subjected to poverty and are most often under pressure due to resource constraints (Wang et al. , Lund et al. 2013, 59). For many of the women migrant workers, mobility become an important livelihood strategy where they migrate to Mizoram for better employment opportunities and income. Though a majority of the women respondents of this fieldwork are employed or are self-employed in the informal sector, it is also important to emphasised that there are other women who are unable to earn a living, have a job or better opportunities both in the destination and receiving countries. For instance, factors such as travel expenses, an educational background can restrict potential migrants to migrate for work. Evermore, a majority of the women migrants are stuck with one employer throughout their stay in destination country unless dismiss as they are scared that they might not be able to retrieve their pay from employers if they self-resign.

As indicated by the findings, most of the women migrant workers often already have contacts from their villages, who in turn would receive and harbor them while the women are looking for jobs. The study further revealed that some of the contacts find jobs for them in the same kind of work through their employers. These so-called contacts are either friends or close relatives who are working in Mizoram for a decent amount of time/years and are well-known with the area. For instance, respondents like Boihi* and her friends migrate together to Mizoram to find jobs and stayed together with their contact until they find a job. A notable Myanmar women leader like Liani* also asserts how family ties are an important feature for these women migrant workers to be able to migrate since they feel safer when they know that they have closed relatives.

The common grounds for these Myanmar women migrant workers to seek employment in their cross-border migration to Mizoram is their intention in improving the livelihood of their families back home in Myanmar. Though the findings show that the women migrant workers often are overworked with long hours at low wages, these migrant workers are enduring as it is their only form of sustaining a better livelihood. Moreover, the young women migrants are motivated to migrate by the development which is happening outside of their villages. This statement is also supported by Wang et al. (2013) in Lund et al. (2013, 62) where he refers to how the motivation of mobilities are varied across the community, household, and individual levels. For instance, respondent like Siannu* feels that she wanted to have new clothes and shoes like her other friends since her parents were not able to give her allowance or buy her all the material things she wanted due to their household conditions, she secretly migrated for work in Mizoram. This shows that young people are capable of using mobility as a strategy to maintain their own livelihoods. Furthermore, the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy has increased significantly as there are increasing employment opportunities even when it is largely limited to the informal sector, and also due to the economic and resource constraints in origin country.

As discussed earlier in findings 5.3, Myanmar women migrant workers earned the average of about an estimation of 3000-5000 INR²⁰ for housemaids or caretaker, 9000 INR²¹ for the rock splitters, and for handloom weavers it varies depending on the weaving pattern of the piece which can amount up to between 500-1500 INR a piece which is equivalent to 60-187 NOK. According to a study by Human Rights Watch (2009), migrant workers in Mizoram are having a difficulty in finding employment, especially for women as they are prone to end up in exploitative conditions at their workplace (Basavapatna 2011, 8-9). Though the conditions of many migrant women's have changed since 2011, there are still some who think that their conditions at their workplace are not getting better. It is also further important to emphasised mobility and migration undertaken by women are not motivated by lucrative wages as discussed. Instead, the findings show that the wages between the local workers and migrant workers differ contrastingly in the labour market as the rights of the women migrants are reduced to a lesser degree.

²⁰ 355.5 NOK – 592.5 NOK.

²¹ 1066.3 NOK.

6.4 Myanmar women migrant workers in the informal labour sector

In Mizoram, there are around 70,000-1,00,000 Myanmar migrants (Basavapatna 2011, 133), however, around 80 percent of them are likely to be undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar who come to work. According to Liani*, President of Womden's League of Chinland, there are far more Myanmar women migrants than men in Mizoram, but the numbers are hard to estimate as most of the migrants, in general, are undocumented because of the border trade dynamic. These women migrant workers use mobility as a strategy to find work and decent pay to sustain their livelihoods. Oftentimes, they have to work in a male-dominated industry such as construction and rock splitting work where the working environment can be precarious. However, the majority of the Myanmar women migrant workers tend to be concentrated in work segmented by gender in the informal sector such as housemaids or caretakers. This can be explained by the fact that there are more opportunities for work prospects in the informal sector where the women migrants are not required to show legal documents of their entry to Mizoram and also for the need to obtain an education for the work they have undertaken. Hence, they are easily exploited in their working environment in the form of low wage and long working hours, though compared to working in the informal sector in Myanmar, their wage can be relatively higher.

The exploitation of women migrant workers is directly related to the fact that they are women and also, a migrant. Withal, women migrant workers feel that their identities as a migrant worker and as a woman has an impact on how they are treated in their working environment. As compared to their counterparts, they are paid lower even though they can be more skilled in the work undertaken such as handweaving and handloom. The findings from the interviews revealed that there are several challenges that women migrant workers faced in both destination and origin countries, and the impact it has on how their gender roles and livelihood strategies. Despite their significant contribution to the family, the interview results show that Myanmar women migrant workers constantly faced challenges prior to, during the journey and under their stay in destination countries.

Women migrant workers in Mizoram tend to be concentrated and occupy jobs in the informal sector mostly as domestic maids, caretakers, and handloom weavers. But according to Mawite* and Tluanga* there are also some few young Myanmar women migrant workers working as

prostitutes at night and have known to contracted sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and are getting treatment from local NGO. To some migrant women worker, the wage is a huge concern, but since they are women, they often are paid lesser than men. However, there are also some women migrant worker who are not motivated to work for the lucrative wage but for financial independence and freedom or are forced to do so if they are trafficked or have borrowed too much from a loan shark or broker. The findings further revealed that Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram are mostly dropouts and are barely finished with their middle school education. This can be the root cause of women working in low-skilled and low paying works. Women migrants often faced challenges when working due to the long working hours and strenuous work that they have in Mizoram. Since they are working in the informal sector, the women migrant workers often feel undervalued of their work by local Mizo employers and Myanmar men as their wage are often lower than average. This indicates that Myanmar women migrant's work and contribution remains unrecognised both in origin and destination countries, and this is due mostly to the fact that Mizoram as a host country is also a patriarchal society that embodies women's role in the labour market and economic development.

As the women migrant workers are most affected by poverty in both origin and destination countries, they do not have the same access to the limited resources for sustaining their livelihoods. As most of the respondents are dropouts from school, their reason is that they are the eldest of the siblings and have to sacrifice for their younger siblings or their parents were unable to afford their education due to their socio-economic conditions of the household and the need for extra hands to earn a living. Likewise, in Mizoram, the women migrant workers are subject to exploitation due to being a woman and a migrant. As a migrant, they do not have the same access to resources that can help them sustain their livelihoods. They have to constantly be cautious of their surroundings so as not to raise suspicions of being an illegal migrant, as their identity can be used against them by employers.

And as a woman, they still are restricted to their gender roles, that is to say, that they are socially marginalised group and lack basic rights and protection. These restrictions can be vague as the women migrant workers see themselves as being financially independent from their parents or spouse, yet, they are still working in the informal labour sector as housemaids, handloom weavers, and domestic workers which are gendered-work. In other words, they have no intention of changing their kind of works to make their ends meet, and by working in these

kinds of work, they feel protected as the work often undergoes inside four walls. The other respondents working as rock splitters or private handloom weavers enjoy more independence from employers as compared to those working as housemaids. However, they have to combine both the reproductive roles and productive roles as in Myanmar and the only difference is that they now have more assets to transform their livelihoods. In comparison to their counterparts, they also lack the bargaining power for working conditions. In general, Myanmar women are expected to be feminine and have responsibility for household chores back at home. Their contribution to the household tasks and child-rearing are not seen as productive roles. Thus, they remain invisible when performing these tasks. However, when families are stricken with poverty, women and children are expected to sacrifice their education and are hit the hardest by it, and demand to work in the household and be an active participant in the labour market.

As mentioned in section 4.4, due to poverty, they often have to migrate to sustain their families and for better livelihood opportunities. During their migration, these women migrants are more vulnerable and are easily exploited though migration offers them better livelihood opportunities and transformations. They often are easy targets of exploitation for human traffickers. And since they use an informal channel for their migratory pattern, they often are easy targets for sexual comments. And unfortunately for women migrants, they are in no position to lodge or file complaints to any public officials as they are scared to be deported. Regardless of the potential they have for improving their livelihood through migration, the risks that women faced during their migratory process is often invisible compared to men.

Moreover, since they are the breadwinner for the family, women are pressurised by family's needs. Though women and men are equally affected by unemployment, women tend to face more dilemmas than men while looking for jobs. Since mobility functions as a key strategy to diversify sources of income for the family, and as the demand for women in the informal labour market is increasing as women are known to be timid and nimble, women are likely to be employed at a lower wage. They have to consistently work in the informal labour market with deprived rights and access to information, and health services. The findings also show that the women migrant workers lack their much-needed basic health services while working in the informal labour market. It is also important to emphasise that these findings and discussions might not relate to all women migrant workers as there are also some who are enjoying some equal privileges like local employees. Nonetheless, women migrant workers experiences in their migration and work pattern are already gendered and biased prior se.

Lastly, as migrant workers, Myanmar women lack basic rights and security, and legal representation because of their illegal migrant status. This can deprive women migrants of the various opportunities and services that are available for migrants. It also hinders the ability and capacity of women migrant workers to be able to find new employers if exploited or are mentally and physically abused by their employers. Though the culture and traditions are likely to be similar between some Myanmar migrants and local Mizos, the Myanmar migrant workers are still constantly in fear of deportation and are not moving freely as desired. Nonetheless, grassroots local NGOs and Myanmar NGOs in Mizoram are currently providing legal help, shelter and other services without charge to women migrant workers.

6.5 Impact of mobility on livelihood transformation

As a strategy for a better means of survival and livelihood, mobility and migration are undertaken by women to minimise the risk to their livelihoods. In the case of Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram, migration is both a short-term and long-term survival strategy as some women choose to remain permanently in the destination country. Thus, migration and mobility of women is seen as a positive contributor to the livelihood transformation for many people living in dire and economic poverty.

6.5.1 Impact on individual livelihood (Micro)

Many young women migrant workers are influenced to migrate for better opportunities in terms of employment, better wages and a better living condition. They are also motivated to make an impact in their gender roles by opposing the constraints of traditional gender roles through their mobility. Though some might not be motivated by the lucrative wages and lifestyles, the findings also show that there are some who are influenced by the modern lifestyle which they are unable to afford back at home. At first, many of these women migrant workers do not feel empowered as they work mainly for survival. However, after returning and coming from migration, they are able to enjoy a freedom of being independent to an extent from the constraints of gender roles. As the findings suggest, they are also able to make decisions about their lives without the need for approval from their family members which further act as a barrier to the prospects of marriage.

One respondent who has continuously work within the handloom industry admits that although she did not enjoy her freedom at first, it has become a norm for her since she had stayed without her parents for quite some time. This respondent further mentions how she has changed drastically after her first migration in terms of how she has become more responsible in the household matters. Though many of the women migrant workers start off a lower wage or a daily labourer, some are able to afford tools like buying a frame loom to start their own livelihood through their access of credit. Another young women respondent added how her mobility has contributed to the fact that she can afford clothes and other material things. This shows that access to credit is relevant to maintaining the individual's certain livelihoods.

Women migrant workers within the male-dominated construction sites feel that they are no lesser than men when performing their job. According to the findings, the respondents working as rock splitters makes them feel more able than their counterparts as their roles are supposed to be feminine and in the reproductive roles. The findings also show that women migrant workers with children are multitasking between household chores, work and their children which further shows that they are capable and active actors both in the reproductive and productive labour force.

Remittances also influence women's existing roles and empower them as they assume additional roles such as control over household assets and taking decisions for their family. In addition, these women migrants also have the tendency to bring back and transfer social remittances to other women such as norms, values, knowledge, behaviour, practices, and skills from their destination country. Through the transfer of these social remittances, they challenge the existing ideas, beliefs, and views such as cultural and traditional gender roles. As such, they are also able to influence non-migrant women and their communities partaking in their decision-making process through their accumulated social remittances.

6.5.2 Impact on household livelihood (Meso)

The decision to migrate for a better livelihood is often undertaken collectively by the household, and thus, remittances are often sent in the form of money or non-cash. For some of the respondents, the possibility of remitting money to their families is a huge motivation for their migration. As an important source of income for the household livelihood, remittances are used to provide basic needs such as food, clothing, education, and healthcare (Lopez-Ekra et al. 2011). For some of the families, these remittances are used to buy assets or provide school fees

for their younger siblings or children which can also be seen as a form of investment for the future. In terms of non-cash remittances like a sack of rice, a tin of oil, preserved foods as canned fish, meat or beans are taken back to home when they visit in kind. These non-cash remittances can provide immediate relief to their families, thus, has a huge impact on the everyday lives of families.

In terms of cash remittances, these remittances are sent mostly via an informal channel or are personally delivered by the migrants (Maimbo and Ratha 2005). The findings also indicate that the remittances that the women migrants send are used for agricultural production as in buying an acre of land, seeds, and fertiliser, whereas some use it to buy livestock such as pigs, chicken or cow. In order to raise income, these agricultural are then sell when they sprout to vegetables or fruits whereas through the livestock's, meat, eggs or milk are sold were to sustain their livelihood. For some families, these remittances are also used to pay off debts that the family has accumulated for years. And for some, it is used to start off a small kiosk inside their house so that they can have some extra income without relying on their migrant daughters or wives.

Though Myanmar women migrant workers are unable to send huge remittances to buy or build new houses, however, their families are able to use the remittances for repairing of their existing house. Nonetheless, for the families, it becomes most crucial to use the remittances for future investments.

6.5.3 Impact on Macro-level

Remittances have the potential to affect the economic growth of a country. For developing countries like Myanmar, remittances does not only have positive impact on the individual and household by reducing the household poverty, enhance the local development and foster social change but in fact, they also constitute a large source of external funding for developing countries, foreign exchange than international trade, aid or foreign investment (Turnell, Vicary, and Bradford 2008, 64-67). Through the contribution of remittances, the economics of the country becomes more stable as it creates income and provides an opportunity to earn an income for the population. However, since the remittances sent from Mizoram (India) are mostly transferred through an informal channel, it is unclear to know how much impact remittances have on the national economy.

Though remittances are argued to have nourishes the local economy, it also creates wealth and income disparity of the country's population. This is so because many of the migrants utilise the remittances to invest in assets and give them access to better opportunities, thus, maximising their potential to grow and contribute to the nation's economy. Moreover, remittances have multiplier effects on the economic development of a country by alleviating the existing poverty which in turn, also decrease gender inequality by giving control and empowerment to women. As mentioned earlier, the remittance of ideas, knowledge, and skills does not only affect the migrants and their livelihoods, but also have a great impact on the political, social, cultural, and economic sphere. With women learning new skills, practices, ideas, and knowledge from their destination country, they challenge on the unequal gender participation in the political and economic sphere and further contribute to a changing shift in women's active participation and in making policies that support the empowerment of women.

6.6 Summary

The above section shows the causes and challenges of Myanmar women migrants are that women are experiencing the changing political and socio-economic conditions, as in poverty and lack of employment on a different level than men. Many of the young women migrant workers are motivated to migrate from the constraints of socially structured gender roles and also to find employment for their future and for sustaining their livelihood. On the other hand, married women are motivated to migrate for the future of their children and for sustaining their livelihood of their family. Due to the gender roles, women's work in the informal labour market is seen as insignificant.

Mobility as a livelihood strategy has cause these women migrant workers to experience certain challenges and transformations upon their arrival and during their stay in Mizoram. During their mobility, women migrant workers often undertook an informal channel due to their poor economic conditions which results in the concentration of women migrant workers in the informal labour market. For these women migrants, working in the informal exposed them to the exploitation of work by employers in the form of low wage and long working hours. Most of these women migrants do not have basic rights and protection and marginalised even in their destination country.

Moreover, due to the encouragement of border trade between Mizoram and Myanmar, it has become easier for women migrants or migrants, in general, to cross the border without registering themselves to the Foreign Registration Office (FRO) and police station which is a requirement for foreigners in India. Many of these women migrants also pay the patrol officers and their brokers some money for them to enter the destination country which highlights the occurrence of illegal activities. Due to the illegal mobility pattern they have undertaken, many women migrants have ended in exploitative and vulnerable working conditions.

Nonetheless, the women migrant workers are able to send remittances to contribute to the transformation of the family's livelihood. These remittances are sent mostly through an informal channel which is through families or friends or taken home personally by the migrants themselves. The remittances are then used by the families to invest in the education of their younger children or buy an acre of land and agricultural products to sell them on the markets and generate income. There are also non-cash remittances which are brought home by the migrants when they are on a visit in the form of a sacked of rice, canned oils, or canned food. Remittances in non-cash forms are useful as they are the immediate basic necessities of the family and can be used when received. Remittances also affect the economic growth of a country. It has contributed to reducing the household poverty and enhance local development.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has tried to contribute to a better understanding of how mobility as a livelihood strategy affects the role and livelihoods of Myanmar women migrant workers in Mizoram, India. By analysing how the experiences and challenges of women migrant workers during their mobility and under their stay in Mizoram are gendered, the thesis discussed the causes and challenges of women's mobility, their channels of mobility, the type of work undertaken by these women migrant workers during their stay in Mizoram, the impact of mobility in Myanmar women migrant workers and how remittances are sent and impact their livelihoods.

This thesis took the privilege of addressing the cause and challenges of Myanmar women's mobility. The findings show that women experience mobility and migration in a different manner than men. An explanation for this finding is related to the fact the distinction of gender that exists in the society. It accounts for the division of certain roles to women and men both in the labour market and at home. Thus, the socially constructed gender roles give the notion of women as weak, feminine, and responsible for reproductive chores at home. Moreover, they are affected by the disproportionate and unequal share of responsibilities and obligations between men and women. This is related to the fact that women in Myanmar are expected to have responsibilities within the household due to their gender roles like babysitting, cooking, or tending to the farms and livestock. They are also limited to certain roles and are expected to behave likewise to be considered as a '*good woman*'. Since gender roles have hindered their opportunity to have a better livelihood and future, most young women want to escape from it.

The motivation to migrate also differs between women migrant workers irrespective of their age. For young women, it is often the lucrative wage, independent from their parents, and breaking away from the norm of gender roles that motivates them. On the other hand, married women want to provide better opportunities for their children and better livelihoods as they are burdened by the lack of income to sustain their livelihood, thus, are motivated to migrate for work. Moreover, some women see migration as an opportunity to redefine their own lives and live in their own terms, as they become financially independent. The reason for women's mobility is discussed in relation to Piper (2008) and Chant (2008) theories on how feminisation of poverty is a determinant factor for women migrant workers in seeking work in other countries. As gender corresponds with mobility, so is the feminisation of poverty and work.

The findings also show that Myanmar women migrant workers are concentrated in the informal labour sector such as housemaids, caretakers, domestic maids, handloom weavers, and rock splitters. An explanation for this finding relates to the way in which they undertook their mobility pattern and in how the labour market is already segregated by the preconceived notion of gender roles. It can also be explained by the fact that due to gender roles, women are seen as weak and as someone who constantly needs protection. Thus, they are often followed by brokers or relatives until they reach their destination country where they are put in the care of others, mostly, of migrant networks.

Since gender and mobility are co-related, it also determines the type of mobility one is entitled to on the basis of their socially constructed gender roles and determine women's access to the resources for transforming their livelihoods. However, through the use of mobility as a livelihood strategy, women are increasingly undertaking movement as the demand of labour force in the labour market increases. Most women migrant workers enter the destination country through an illegal channel. This illegal channel is produced by the cross-border trade between India and Myanmar as it is often unguarded or other illegal activities are occurring in the premise of the border gate. The reason that women migrant workers use an informal channel for their mobility is that it is the cheapest, although it is not risk-free. Sometimes, the women migrants have to pay some cash to the patrolling officers to enter the destination but still, are not registered with the Foreign Registration Office and local police station. Thus, are still perceived as illegal migrant workers as they did not acquire the necessary documents or register themselves at the border. This also affects the conditions of women's employment, income, and mobility needs. Due to their illegal mobility pattern, most of the Myanmar women migrant workers are occupying jobs in the informal labour market mostly as housemaids, handloom weavers, or domestic workers. The findings also show that they are experiencing work exploitation as they have to work in these informal sectors with relatively low paid, long working hours, and poor working conditions.

The findings and discussion also show that women migrant workers tend to be subject to more exploitation due to first, being a woman and secondly, an illegal migrant. Another reason can be the fact that most of the Myanmar women migrant workers in the informal sector are mostly dropouts and barely finished their middle school education due to the socio-economic

conditions of their family. Though they contribute highly in the economic development of both origin and destination country, they are still underpaid and undervalued of their work.

Nonetheless, the findings show that most women migrant workers feel more able as they assumed the role of a breadwinner which is a traditional men's role. Moreover, some young women migrants also have challenged the existing traditional ideas and views such as gender roles and have taken household decisions which shows that they are advancing, though in small-scale. The finding also shows that through their mobility, women migrant workers are able to send home remittances to their families and provide an opportunity to have future investments in the form of paying for their siblings or children's education and buy agricultural products which they can sell at local market to generate extra income. Moreover, these remittances are also used to open small kiosk which can further contribute to transforming a better livelihood, even if the transformation is small.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FIELDWORK 2017 GENDER AND MOBILITY

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. I want to remind you that this is a part of my master's thesis and may be published under Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim. And I need your permission to publish this interview transcript in part or in its entirety.

Part I. Basic profile data

Please state your full name.?

Where and when were you born?

What is your current occupation?

How many members are there in your family?

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

What was it like growing up?

Could you describe your life in your country of origin (Burma? Where?)

Part II. Mobility and Migration

Why and how did you come to Mizoram?

And why did you choose it specifically?

Who made the decision for you to move to your destination?

And how was it made?

Did it take a long time for you to decide? Yes? No?

What was the reason behind it?

Who provided the money for the transportation?

Part III. Labour and Gender

Did you find a job immediately? Was there a job waiting for you?

Who helped you find a job?

Do you like your job? How are your working conditions like?

Did you ever feel less paid due to your gender? If so, in what ways? Could you elaborate further? Have you ever think about changing your job?

What kind of complications do you meet with your job?

Are you completely satisfy with the work that you are getting now? How much do they pay you per hour/per month?

Is it sufficient for you as a woman? As a sole provider?

Part IV. Mobility and Transformation

In what ways has your mobility to the country change your livelihood? Your role in the household when you visit? Any particular change you notice?

Have you ever considered working and challenging yourself in this kind of environment?

Do you feel more strong and independent on your role as a woman and as a provider for your household?

What kind of transformations have you contributed to yourself as well your family? How long are you planning to stay here?

Do you plan to continue to work here and reside permanently or do you plan to go home and come back for another season?

Did you ever meet any kind of hindrance to your independency as a woman?

Is there anything you would like to add to the interview?

Thank you for participating in this project.