BROCHURE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
On
Gender, Migration, and the Indian Diaspora
Historical Trajectories and Contemporary Realities

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Organised by

Centre for West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

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About the Conference:

Migration refers to a process where individuals migrate from one area or region and cross into another area or region, regardless of their intention or how they get there. People migrate for many reasons, such as seeking financial prosperity, seeking educational opportunities, family reunification, and social mobility. This is evident that a person's sex, gender identity and sexual orientation shape every stage of the migration experience. Gender affects reasons for migrating, who will migrate, the social networks migrants use to move, integration and labour opportunities at destination, and relations with their country of origin. This process of migration not only impacts the physical locations of individuals, but it also influences cultural identity and social structure in the country where they migrate from and the destination country. The Indian diaspora is one of the largest and most dispersed diasporas worldwide. The majority of individuals from the Indian diaspora are descendants of labour migrants and were subjected to historical patterns of movement. Millions of Indians were brought to work on sugar plantations in the Caribbean, Africa, and the Indian Ocean during the late 19th century and early 20th century due to colonial systems of indentured labour. These movements have created a significant network of Indian diaspora communities in many countries and have resulted in subsequent migration after 1947 during the post-colonial period because of economic and professional migration.

According to the principles of history, we can see that Indian migration has changed over time. This change is evident when we examine historical patterns from colonial times (colonially motivated) and continuing into the present day. One observation is that migration has changed from labour migration to student migration, skilled workers, family, and other

types of migration. Gender also plays a critical role in shaping migration patterns. Genderrelated issues have affected women's migration experiences. In the past, scholars have often concentrated on men's migration or disregarded women's migration altogether. However, recent research has illuminated women's active participation, struggles, and agency within that migratory process. This has informed researchers' understanding of how gendered behaviour will impact migration researchers and, consequently, the future of population migration, as well as how researchers will view the history of migration.

Women migrants have made significant strides in asserting *their* presence within the contemporary and historical *migration discourse* and *global mobility debates*. For a long time, *systemic* gender blindness or the neglect of women's presence persisted in Indian narratives on migration *across* policy priorities, *institutional frameworks* and academic discussions — resulting in a significant knowledge gap. As a result, women's voices, lived experiences, and *their* crucial role in the multi-dimensional success story of the Indian diaspora remained overlooked and under-acknowledged. Over time, however, *a gradual but transformative* discourse shift has taken place due to *intersecting* international and domestic developments, moving away from portraying women as stereotypical, victimised, muted figures to recognizing the *complex*, multi-faceted aspects of their agency across social, cultural, economic, legal, *and political spheres of the diaspora*.

Today, women form the core and *dynamic heart* of the Indian diaspora and are indispensable to a comprehensive understanding of *migration processes* and diaspora formation. Women have participated in *virtually* all migratory movements that extended beyond Indian borders, and like the broader Indian diaspora, *women within it constitute a heterogeneous and diverse group shaped by intersecting identities of class, caste, religion, region, and age*. During the British colonial period, women began migrating from India under indenture systems and similar coerced labour arrangements, both as *dependents* and as independent migrants. It is historically documented that the colonial authorities *mandated* the transport of 40 women for every 100 men in indentured labour batches, *a policy aimed at stabilising settlement patterns* and *social reproduction* on plantations. These indentured women underwent *severe* exploitation in plantation colonies *through* coercive labour practices and patriarchal control *by both colonial authorities and male counterparts.* Nevertheless, their presence profoundly influenced Indian socio-cultural trends, *community formation*, political economy, *and early resistance movements* in plantation contexts. Contemporary scholarship has progressively moved beyond stereotypical and objectified images of indentured women to explore the

multilayered dimensions of their agency, resilience, and active participation in shaping plantation life *and cultural continuity*.

In the present era, women continue to migrate in diverse capacities, including as spouses, *dependents and family units*, unskilled domestic workers, semi-skilled workers, skilled professionals, and highly skilled independent migrants. Many migrate as the primary breadwinners or economic anchors of their families, *making a profound impact on livelihoods*, remittances, and *economic transformation* at both *micro and macro levels*. A substantial number of women continue to migrate as dependents, but within *family migration trajectories*, they frequently *exercise agency*, entering host-country workforces, albeit sometimes in roles that *do not fully reflect their qualifications* or *professional training*. In semiskilled and unskilled labour categories, women include domestic workers, caregivers, semi-trained medical personnel, *hospitality workers*, and others. Though such women display substantial decision-making power in both *household and economic spheres*, they often remain in *highly precarious* and disadvantageous positions due to limited labour rights, lack of legal protections, and social exclusion. *Consequently*, their restricted access to education, labour market information, *adequate legal representation*, and awareness about rights and privileges frequently leads to exploitative employment conditions and *prolonged separation* from families.

The highly skilled women migrants, including professionals in technology, academia, healthcare, *management*, and research, are comparatively best placed in the host-country job market and have greater capacity for socio-economic integration. However, many highly skilled Indian women *voluntarily or under persistent patriarchal cultural norms* prioritise domestic and caregiving responsibilities and therefore *often opt for part-time or informal employment*. This trend affects their labour market inclusion, perpetuates *gendered labour segmentation*, and *creates disparities in professional status* vis-à-vis men. *Structural barriers such as restrictive visa categories (for example, H-1B and H-4 in the U.S.) further constrain labour force participation for women migrants even when they possess advanced skills or qualifications*, leaving them in vulnerable or peripheral employment positions. Additionally, *women scholars and student migrants* represent a significant segment of highly skilled migration; India is one of the world's largest student-sending countries, and although female student participation has grown substantially, *systematic documentation remains limited*, pointing to an important research and data gap.

Women are also *among the most vulnerable* as trafficked and irregular migrants. These categories, irregular migration pathways, human trafficking networks, and undocumented work sectors, place women at *the highest risk of exploitation, abuse, and peril* during both the migration journey and in destination contexts. Another closely interrelated group within women migrants includes *left-behind spouses*, particularly wives whose partners migrate *ahead* in search of labour opportunities. One persistent concern raised in national discourse is the issue of *abandonment of left-behind wives* or *fraudulent marriages tied to migration*, which remain widespread in some regions of India.

Globally, there is a notable shift in women's migration patterns. In 2024, the number of women and girls among international migrants reached 146 million, accounting for 48% of all international migrants worldwide, reflecting *incremental progress in gender-balanced mobility* and *broadening global opportunities* for women's migration. Indian migration trends further underscore this shift. According to recent UN DESA estimates, women migrants from India account for 57.1% of all Indian international migrants, a significant increase from earlier decades, and a figure that *surpasses the female migrant share* in many regions. Despite this progress and increased scholarly attention, gendered aspects of migration, including wage discrimination, unequal labour rights, and intersecting forms of discrimination, remain central challenges within international, regional, and national policy spaces.

As a consequence of these developments and the growing global feminization debate, women's migration issues have moved from the margins to *central positions in academic, policy, and institutional discourses*, including those led by the UN, IOM, and other multilateral organisations. Yet there remains a pressing need for *comprehensive policy frameworks*, enforced protections, and empowerment strategies that address *the intersecting vulnerabilities* faced by women migrants. Female migrants frequently experience *double discrimination* — as migrants and as women within host institutions and societies, and women's migration remains comparatively understudied, especially in intersectional, longitudinal, and comparative research paradigms.

The proposed conference seeks to bring all these interlinked aspects onto a single multidisciplinary platform and to generate *new theoretical, empirical, and policy-relevant approaches* that amplify the subjective and lived voices of women in the Indian diaspora. By capturing the *complex processes of migration and settlement* of women across both colonial and contemporary periods, the conference aims to map struggles, transformational

experiences, structural barriers, and forms of agency that shape women's trajectories. The conference will draw on *diverse disciplinary perspectives*, *field research*, and *comparative insights* to advance new scholarship that meaningfully engages with women's roles, contributions, and challenges within diaspora contexts. The *resulting edited volume and policy briefs* will showcase innovative scholarship, address *significant knowledge gaps*, and serve as a global advocacy platform that amplifies women's voices and promotes gender equality in migration governance.

About the University

Jamia Millia Islamia, a Public Central University; established in 1920, originally at Aligarh in United Provinces which in 1925 initially moved to Karol Bagh, Delhi and later built up in Jamia Nagar. In 1988, it became the Central University by an Act of Parliament and since then it is expanding in different directions achieving the new dimensions.

The mission of the founding fathers of this great institution should not only serve as a beacon light for all the stakeholders but should also inspire all in making this university as one of the premier institutions of higher learning in the world. It should attain distinction in providing cutting edge learning experience, internationally benchmarked education, intellectual freedom and critical research opportunities in frontier areas of contemporary concern.

Today, Jamia Millia Islamia is accredited A++ grade Central University by NAAC during the 2nd cycle in December 2021. The university is an ensemble of a multi- layered educational system which covers all aspects of schooling, under-graduate and post-graduate education.

About the Centre for West Asian Studies

The Centre for West Asian Studies was established in July 2004 and formally inaugurated by Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, on 29 January 2005. It is part of the institution founded under a programme of the research and development initiated by the Jamia Millia Islamia, a university steeped in secular values and ideas. The scope of the studies includes all the countries of West Asia including Turkey. India has always had multifaceted relations with peoples of the region.

The Centre seeks to foster interdisciplinary academic pursuit of the West Asia and promote research on the region's politics, economics, culture and its relations with India as well as its interconnections to a larger global milieu. It aims to provide a forum for informed exchange of ideas among students, faculty, and scholars from outside, and serve as a niche for public policy studies. It equally aims to generate and provide resources through which the interested and expert alike, can understand a region which has close and historic cultural, economic and religious links with India. It also seeks to promote an Indian perspective on developments in the region, especially those which equally impinge on global peace, security and development.

The Centre admits students in P.G. and Ph.D programmes for two and five years, respectively. The educational objective of the Centre is to impart specialist knowledge of the region to its students, in order to enable them to pursue careers in research and teaching, journalism, business, government and non-governmental organisations, and others. As West Asia becomes an increasingly important region for India and the wider world, the Centre is expected to excel with newer research and taught courses. It remains committed to deepening knowledge of the region through rigorous teaching, innovative research, and essential language-learning modules.

Objective of the Conference

(These objectives are illustrative and not Exhaustive)

1. To examine the participation and representation of diasporic women in politics, economic structures, and social institutions, including formal leadership roles and community networks.
2. To analyse the discursive shift from 'victimology' to recognition of women migrants as empowered agents, decision-makers, and community leaders.
3. To study the role of international organisations, transnational networks, and global governance frameworks in the promotion of gender equality in migration.
4. To investigate structural factors, economic, legal, cultural, and policy-driven, that impact women's migration trajectories.
5. To assess policy initiatives and governance frameworks related to women migrants developed by the Government of India and *host countries*.

Sub-themes of the Conference

1. Gender and Conceptual Understanding of Migration and Diaspora
   - Feminization of Migration and Intersectional Perspectives
   - Impact of Migration on Children and Women
   - Globalisation and its impact on women's migration patterns
2. Women and Colonial Migration
   - Indentured Migration
   - Maistri/ Kangani system and gendered labour mobilisation
   - Free-trade Migration and early entrepreneurial roles

3. Transnational Engagement of Women Diaspora
    - Women and Transnational Networks
    - Women Diaspora in civil society, social activism and global movements
4. Government Initiatives, Programmes and Policies for Women Migrants
    - Participation and representation in global politics
    - Contribution of women diaspora to the global economy and development sectors
5. Migration and Its Impact on Left-Behind Families
    - Social, emotional, and economic dimensions of family separation
6. Gender-Based Challenges and Empowerment
    - Forced Migration and Trafficking
    - Peace, Conflict, and Refugees
    - Domestic Workforce conditions and labour rights gap
7. Migrant Women Entrepreneurship
    - Women and Remittances
    - Women-led philanthropy and community investment models
8. Women's Migration and Ecology
    - Environmental Advocacy by Diasporic Women
    - Climate justice and gendered environmental responses
9. Women Migrants and the Role of International Organisations
    - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on gender equality
    - Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and framework for gender-responsive policies
10. Women, Migration, and Diaspora in Regional and Global Dynamics
    - Gulf region migration patterns
    - South and South-East Asia dynamics\
    - Migration trends in North America
    - European contexts and policy responses

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Eligibility:

- Open to scholars, researchers, academicians, practitioners, policy analysts, and students from across the globe.

- Participants from disciplines such as Gender Studies, Migration Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, History, Political Science, International Relations, Diaspora Studies, Economics, and related fields are encouraged to apply.
- Independent researchers and professionals with demonstrated research interest in gender, migration, or diaspora studies are also welcome.

Abstract Submission:

- Word Limit: 250–300 words
- Deadline: 15 September 2026
- Abstracts should clearly outline the research question, methodology, and theoretical framework (if applicable), and key arguments. Interested participants are requested to submit their abstracts along with the required details through the Google Form provided below. Participants are requested to carefully fill in all the necessary information and upload/submit their abstract as per the guidelines mentioned in the concept note.

To submit your abstract and register your interest, please fill out the Google Form:

https://forms.gle/15Eki8eZUgzkrRSD6

Paper Submission (for selected participants):

- Word Limit: 5,000–7,000 words
- Deadline for full paper: Will be communicated upon acceptance of abstract
- Papers must follow academic standards of in-text citation (APA style accepted).

Format:

- Title of the paper, author's name, institutional affiliation, contact details, and sub-theme under which the paper falls.

Prof Anisur Rahman
Conference Convene

Prof. Hemayun Akhtar Nazmi
Director