

# Unskilled Labour Force Participation in the Towns of Nepal

( A case study of Gada Pushers in three urban areas  
of Kathmandu Valley )

Bishnu Subedi★

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-increasing traffic of vehicles in the streets of Kathmandu, one often wonders why there should be a slow-moving vehicle pushed by half-clad and bare footed men often drenched with their own sweat. One often wonders, how these manual vehicles are thriving in the competition? And why the pushers prefer this sort of work in the contemporary society? What are the factors responsible for putting these vehicles on the streets and these people on this work?

A look into the problem reveals that not much thought have been given to this matter, nor there is any literature or documents to elucidate the problem nor there has been a work to provoke the thoughts of a scholar or a politician or an administrator on this matter. Therefore, a small study was designed to look into the facts of life of these laboureres, of their work, of their contributions and of their problems prevalent today. Many rural dwellers around the valley who have migrated to urban areas of Kathmandu constituting a large group of rural-poor. This group also includes a large number of Indians who have joined the labour force

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★ This research article has been primarily based on the authors' M. A. Dissertation paper Submitted to the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University in 1980.

due to acute shortage of employment opportunities in their areas. Because they are uneducated, unskilled and poor, they are working as *house-workers, street shop-keepers, leaders, porters, coolies, agricultural workers, rikshwa pullers* and *gada pushers*.

The main group of this study is this *Gada pushers*, which is a group of migrated unskilled workers stationing in and around the main routes of Kathmandu city. Moreover, most of them prefer seasonal employment in non-agricultural sector during the slack agricultural season because they have their own small holding of land and the family at their homes. So, most of them are found to be *practising* agricultural operations as well.

The seasonal migration of *Gada Pushers* is not a recent tendency. Such people started to come to Kathmandu Valley since this business started. Although, no exact history of the development of *gada* business can be found, it is estimated that this activity started about 13 years ago. At that time there were only a few *gadas*, when the *Sahus* (owners) found this business profitable, they didn't miss the chance of earning more profit and began to rent out as many *gada* as they could offer. Thus, the number of *gadas* as well as *pushers* began to increase year after year. At present there are 340 *gadas* and about 1000 *gada pushers* in Kathmandu Valley.

Recently, Kathmandu valley has witnessed a rapid development of building construction, resulting in a serious haulage problem. This has created a real need for short-range transportation. That means for transporting construction materials such as cement, iron rods, woods and the like. This work has been successfully conducted by the *Thela Gada* which is also named as *Gorkhali Gadi*. As a result the *gadas* has become a part of traffic in all kinds of roads and streets of Kathmandu.

A large number of hill youths are involved in this *Gorkhali Gadi* and are solving the haulage problem [problem of transporting goods from one place to another]. No doubt, there are different means of transportation for this purpose. One can use trucks, jeeps, taxis, rikshawa or even porters. But the vehicles like jeeps, trucks, taxis are not allowed to go in many corners of the inner city. In many cases they can't be used due to very narrow roads. Hiring a rikshaw has become one of the costly means of transportation and its use is declining. Using a porter is impossible in the case of bulk and the unmanageable size of the materials.

Therefore, amongst the available means for shortrange transportation, *Gadas* (*Thela Gada* or the three wheelers) are the cheapest and best way of transportation. The capacity of a single *gada* is nearly 6 times greater than that of a rikshaw and about 25 times greater than

that of a human porter. Jeeps and trucks may have greater capacity but they are costlier, not easily available, and also imperfect in the sense that they require extra manual force for loading and unloading activities. Thus, the gadas have become a very popular means of transportation in the Kathmandu valley. Increasing number of persons are engaged in this occupation rendering a great contribution to the socio-economic dynamism of Kathmandu valley. These persons are mainly rural dwellers seeking seasonal employment during the slack season in agriculture. Thus the study of *Gada pushing* activity has become an interesting subject for the social science researchers. It is, in this context, this study has been undertaken to through some lights on the problems and prospects of the labour currently engaged in pushing the sluggish cart called *Thela-Gada*.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The basic objectives of this study were as follows.

- [A] To analyse the economic condition of Gada Pushers.
  - a. Employment situation
  - b. Income distribution pattern
  - c. Consumption, saving and investment
  - d. Migration, its causes and pattern.
- [B] To study different non-economic aspect of Gada Pushers.
  - a. Age, sex and marital status
  - b. Ethnic composition and family size
- [C] To compare the economic situation of Gada Pusher with other unskilled groups of workers.
- [D] To find out the economic problems of Gada Pushers and suggest some practical suggestions.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

### Sampling Procedure:

Sampling frame of this study was made on the basis of the gadas that were registered in Bagmati Zonal Police Office, Kathmandu. First of all, the registration list was obtained from Kathmandu and Lalitpur town Panchayat offices. The list obtained from these offices does not indicate the exact number of gada operating in Kathmandu because there might be some

owners who have not paid the gada tax. So the total number of gadas obtained from the Town Panchayat Offices can obviously be estimated to be less than that of the list from the Zonal Police Office. According to Zonal police Office the total number of gadas were found to be 340.

Out of this total only 15 per cent or 51 gadas were interviewed.

To obtain the required information about the gada pushing work three sets of questionnaire were designed to include all the three group of persons involved in this business. They are as follows:

- (a) Gada owners
- (b) Gada pushers
- (c) Gada-owner-cum pushers.

Prior to conducting sample survey questionnaire were pre-tested in a small group of Gada pushers. On the basis of difficulties encountered during the pre-test, some ambiguous questions were removed some were reconstructed and some additional questions were inserted in order to collect all the pertinent information and facts.

As regards the three groups, the sampling was done on the following basis.

- (a) 85 per cent of the sample was concentrated on pushers group. Altogether 44 pushers were interviewed as they constitute the main target of this study.
- (b) 10 per cent of the sample that is, 5 Gada owners were interviewed.
- (c) 5 per cent of sample was allotted to owner-cum-pushers. On this basis 2 owner-cum-pushers were interviewed.

The sampling used in this study is purposive random sampling. Most of the Gada pushers have homogenous character from the point of view of the work, income and expenditure pattern. As such 15 per cent of the sample is considered as sufficient in analysing information, since it could fairly represent the situation of this profession.

This study was intended to cover the three town panchayats of Kathmandu valley. But since there are no gadas in Bhaktapur town panchayat and insignificant number in Lalitpur town panchayat, the study is focussed on Kathmandu as most of the *Gada pushers* are concentrated around the main routes of Kathmandu city. The main centres of "Gada Station" in Kathmandu are:

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| (a) Kalimati                           | (b) Teku                  |
| (c) Dhan Godam, Thapathali             | (d) Babar Mahal           |
| (e) Mahabauddha                        | (f) Indra chowk           |
| (g) Purano Bhansar                     | (h) Sundhara (Sahid Gate) |
| (i) Kamalachhi Tole<br>and in Lalitpur | (j) Sora Khutte           |
| (k) Mangal Bazar, and                  | (l) Jawalakhel.           |

While taking sample survey maximum attention was given to represent the *Gada Pushers* stationed at these various centres.

The 15 per cent of the sampling which covers most of such pushers of Kathmandu is believed to provide enough data and information for the analysis of the subject under this small case study.

The study is therefore based on extensive primary data supported by secondary source materials such as books, journals and papers relating to the subject.

#### 4. AN ANALYSIS OF NON-ECONOMIC INFORMATION ON GADA PUSHERS

##### 4.1 Age Distribution

We know that pushing a gada needs strength and the strength is more or less determined by age. Strength generally increases after the age 15 and goes on increasing up to 40, there after it goes on declining slowly. But the age is not the sole determinant of strength. It depends upon so many other factors like health and hygienic situation etc.

However, most of the *Gada Pushers* fall in the age group of 20-34. The table below shows that out of the total this group represent 72 per cent. No pushers are found below 15 and above 50. The percentage of the pushers above the age 35 is negligible. This indicates that young people highly dominate the rural-urban migration stream and also that the gada pushing activity needs such strength and stamina which] the persons below 15 and above 35 cannot provide.



**Table 1**  
**Gada Pushers by Age Group**

Age group	No. of Pushers	Percentage
15-19	5	11.3
20-24	9	20.4
25-29	15	34.0
30-34	8	18.2
35-39	2	4.5
40-44	1	2.3
45-49	4	19.3
50 and above	0	-
Total	44	100.0

Source: Field Survey.

#### 4.2 Family Size

In the field survey total number of *Gada Pushers'* family staying in Kathmandu or at home were obtained. The table below shows that more than 50 per cent of the pushers have family members less than 6 persons and the average family size was found to be 6.5 person per household

**Table 2**  
**Family Size of the Gada Pushers**

Person	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 and above
No. of household of the pusher	2	4	7	8	3	5	4	5	6
Percentage	4.5	9	16	18.2	6.8	11.3	18.2	11.3	13.6

Source: Field Survey.

**Table 4**  
**Gada Pushers by Ethnic Group**

S. No.	Ethnicity	No. of Pushers	Percentage
1.	Magar	19	43.1
2.	Brahmin	9	20.4
3.	Chhetri	8	18.2
4.	Tamang	5	11.3
5.	Newar	1	2.3
6.	Rai	2	4.5
	Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

#### 4.5 Literacy

During the field survey, *Gada pushers* were asked whether they were literate or not? The following table indicates that 20.4 percent of the total sample *Gada pushers* are literate.

**Table 5**  
**Educational Status of Gada Pushers**

Status	No. of pushers	percentage
Literate	9	20.4
Illiterate	35	79.6
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

Average family size of Kathmandu valley is 5.6 and of the nation as a whole is 5.53 in 1971.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that the average family size of the *Gada Pushers* is little bigger than both the family size of Kathmandu valley and the family size of the nation as a whole.

#### 4.3 Marital Status

Most of the *Gada Pushers* were found married. This is because of the tradition of early marriage in the villages of Nepal. The table below shows that 79.5 per cent of the pushers were married.

**Table 3**

**Marital Status of the Gada Pushers**

Marital Status	No of Pushers	Percentage
Married	35	79.5
Unmarried	9	20.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.4 Ethnic Composition & Mother Tongue

##### ETHNIC COMPOSITION

With regard to ethnic group, the Magars, and the socially high ethnic group of Brahmins, and Chhetris constitutes the majority of the total pushers.

This table indicates that these three groups constitute 82 per cent of the total pushers. Amongst them the highest number of pushers are the Magars (43 per cent). The share of other ethnic group is negligible with the exception of Tamangs.

<sup>1</sup> HMG/National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics; "Population Census of Nepal—1971". Vol. 1. July 1973.



This compares quite fairly with literacy rate of the nation which is 19.2 per cent (in 1975).<sup>2</sup>

Attainment of the educational level was also asked to the literate pushers, but their responses suggest that they have not completed even the primary education. Most of them can read and write, but they had never been to school.

#### 4.6 Job Satisfaction

In order to find out whether the pushers are satisfied with their work, two supporting questions were asked to the respondents. They were:

- (a) Whether they will return back to their home or not, if they are provided a work carrying the same income at home, and
- (b) Whether they were satisfied in this work or not?

The table below shows that 84 per cent of the pushers are willing to go back if they were provided employment opportunity at home:

**Table 6**  
**Willingness of the Pushers to Go Back**

Willingness	No. of pushers	Percentage
Willing to go back	37	84.0
Not willing to go back	7	16.0
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

This indicates the acute problem of employment in the hill area. Most of the *Gada Pushers* come to Kathmandu only to seek seasonal employment in the valley during the slack season and they will be in more profit if they are provided the same income at home.

The table below shows the job satisfaction of *Gada pushers*.

Table 7

## Gada Pushers' Job Satisfaction

Satisfaction	No. of pushers	Percentage
Satisfied	20	45.4
Unsatisfied	24	54.5
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

45 per cent of the pushers are satisfied while 55 per cent are not. Those, who are not satisfied with the gada pushing work are seeking other employment opportunities in the valley. The dissatisfaction stemmed not because of low income but because of uncertainty of income and difficult nature of the work. The compulsion of rent payment (rent of gada), even if there is no income, also caused dissatisfaction.

#### 4.7 Health

Though it is difficult to know about health condition of the *Gada pushers* as a result of their gada pushing activities a question was asked to the respondents to throw some light on this issue, i.e., the health hazards involved in gada pushing works. The question was what do they feel about the change in their health after starting this work. 52 per cent of the pushers feel no change in their health and 48 per cent feel a bad effect in their health. This may be due to their involvement in this work for a long period.

#### 4.8 Competition With Other Mode of Transportation

Most of the *Gada Pushers* are not aware of the competition they have to face with other modes of transportation. They do not feel that their work is hampered by some other modes of transportation like Jeeps, Tractors, Trucks, etc.

One of the main competitors of gadas is the tractor, which has more or less equal capacity of carrying goods with minimum fuel consumption. No doubt, jeeps and trucks also hamper the work of gadas but they have large capacity and are cheaper only for long distance transportation.

But the gadas are safe from the competition of both tractors as well as jeeps and trucks. It is because tractors are insignificant in number in Kathmandu and jeeps and trucks are costlier means of transportation for the short distances and are not allowed to enter the inner city all through the day or night.

#### 4.9 Relation between Owners and Pushers

The gada pushing activities involve mainly two groups of people i.e. owners and pushers. For the smooth working of the business, sound relation between these two groups is inevitable. But it was observed that only 27 per cent of the pushers had better relation with the Gada owners.

## 5 AN ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC BEHAVIOURS OF GADA PUSHERS

### 5.1 Migration Pattern

“A person tends to remain in the same community so long as his needs are satisfied. In fact, these tend to be an identification of the self with the locale in which one has resided for a prolonged time, and some emotional strain is involved in separating oneself from this locale and from family friends and colleagues for a strange new environment.”<sup>3</sup>

This states that no person leaves his community without a cause. Migration takes place either as a response to some impelling needs that the person believes that he can not satisfy at the present residence or a flight from a situation that for some reason has become undesirable, unpleasant or intolerable. Therefore, “push” and “pull” factors are responsible for migration.

During the field work an attempt was made to identify the main factors of migration. The table below shows that 61 per cent of the *Gada pushers* migrated in order to seek employment. 34 per cent migrated to earn additional money and an insignificant percentage migrated due to floods and draughts (i. e., natural calamities).

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3 Bogue, Donald J.; “Principles of Demography”. Community and Family study Centre, University of Chicago 1969. Chapter 19, p. 753.

Table 8

## Causes of Migration

S. No.	Causes	No. of Pushers	Percentage
1.	To seek employment	27	61.36
2.	To earn additional income	15	34.09
3.	Natural calamities (floods/draughts)	2	4.54
	Total	44	100.00

Source: Field Survey.

This makes the argument more stronger that the main cause of migration is the lack of employment opportunities in the hill areas during the slack agricultural season. How could a young man stay at home without work when he has the responsibility of providing food, clothing and other basic materials to his family members? Provision of these materials is quite impossible when he himself is unemployed. The alternative opened to him is to go outside and involve himself in some activities. Some attraction is offered by Kathmandu valley, where he could get some work and be able to fulfill some of his responsibilities.

Among to "push" factors, unemployment and under-employment at their villages, shortage of land, the lack of food and other basic needs of life appear to be the important factors.

The "pull" factors are associated with "push" factors. The factors that are associated with "pull" factors are the availability of employment for unskilled labourers in Kathmandu, the expectation of higher wage and other urban benefits and the "razzle dazzle" of the city.

## 5.2 Migration by Age Group

Age is an important factor that causes migration. The table below shows that most of the *Gada Pushers* migrated at the age between 15 to 24. This group represents, 68 per cent of the total. After the age of 25 the rate of migration declines. The study confirms

that youths are more migratory than elderly people. However, it is noteworthy that children and young boys do not accompany the elders. Generally youngsters are employed in their own villages for grazing the cattle. The tendency of migration is almost nil after the age of 45, the obvious reason being that at this age a person would not be able to perform labourious tasks.

**Table 9**

**The Age of Gada Pushers at the Time of Migration**

Age Group	No. of Pushers	Percentage
below 15	5	11.36
15 - 19	19	43.18
20 - 24	11	25.00
25 - 29	4	11.36
30 - 34	4	9.09
35 - 39	0	-
40 - 44	1	2.27
45 - 49	0	-
50 and above	0	-
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

### 5.3 The Duration of Migration

The table below shows the duration of stay of the *Gada Pushers* in the valley. It will also help to know the present trend of migration.



**Table 10**  
**Duration of Migration**

Year Of Migration	No. of Pushers	Percentage
Before 1970	9	20.45
1971	1	2.27
1972	-	-
1973	2	4.54
1974	3	6.88
1975	7	15.90
1976	4	9.09
1977	8	18.18
1978	1	2.27
1979	9	20.45
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

It is seen from the table that 9 out of 44 (20.45 per cent) *Gada Pushers* are working in Kathmandu for the last 10 years or more. But the percentage of pushers working for 6 to 9 years is far too low, i. e., only 2 to 6 per cent. Percentage of pushers working for 3 to 5 years is high. But percentage of pushers working since last 2 years is again low where as the percentage of pushers working since last year is again high i.e, 20.45 per cent.

However, what is found in the survey may not depict the exact situation, because the survey was done from the last week of Baisakh to the last week of Jestha, 2037. This was the time when the Referendum was just completed in Nepal and also it was the peak period of agricultural cultivation in the country. Whatever may be the case we find an increasing trend of migration.

#### 5.4 Employment Situation

Most of the pushers have responded that they go home in the peak agricultural seasons and also during the national festivals like *Dasai* and *Tihar*. Only a few pushers who do

not have much land or who are landless and those pushers who live with their family in the valley do not go to their home. They are employed in their own initiation and have to find out the work on their own.

*Gada pushers* work on hired gadas from the owners. They have to face uncertainty in their work. This uncertainty arises mainly in two ways:

- [i] It is uncertain for a pusher to get a gada as soon as he arrives from his home. So, he must wait for some days to get a gada.
- [ii] Secondly, *Gada pushers* have to face uncertainty about getting the work from the public. No doubt, their work is to carry goods from one corner to another but contractual basis of work does not exist.

The degree of uncertainty was observed during the field work and an account was made of the loss days. The table below shows the number of loss days in a month. It is clear that only 1 out of 44 pushers recorded no loss days in a month. But most of them have the loss days ranging from 6 to 10 days. This is 63.64 per cent of the total. The average loss days is 6.1 days per month and 73.2 days per year, on the condition that they work for the whole year.

**Table 11**

**Loss Days per Month**

Loss days	No. of pushers	Percentage
0	1	2.27
1 - 5	14	31.81
6 - 10	28	63.64
above 10	1	2.27
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey.

Everyone needs leisure once or twice a week. Therefore the *Gada pushers* also do not work for the whole year or month. The nature of their work is very hard. So, it is necessary

for them to take rest or leisure once or twice a week. Even then there are some pushers who do not take rest the whole month and work continuously. The table below shows that 45 per cent of the pushers did not enjoy even a day's leave during a month period. 43 per cent of the pushers are found taking leave for 1 to 5 days in a month and 11 per cent of the pushers are found taking

Table 12

## Leave Enjoyed per Month

No. of days	No. of pushers	Percentage
0	20	45.7
1 - 5	19	43.2
above 5	5	11.4
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

leave for more than 5 days. In an average they have taken leave for 2.7 days a month or 33 days a year.

On the average they are in loss for 73.2 days a year because of non availability of load (work) and they take leave for 33 days a year. Thus, in total they do not work for 106 days out of 365 days in a year. Their actual working days will be  $(365-106) = 259$  days a year on the condition that they do not go home to work in agriculture.

### 5.5 Income Distribution

The income of *Gada Pushers* is assessed from an indirect method i. e., through expenditure. Total expenditure is divided into two categories: daily expenditure and monthly expenditure. Daily expenditure includes the rent of Gada and monthly expenditure includes house rent, family support (i. e. amount of income sent back home) as a part of saving and the expenditure in entertainment like cinemas etc.

The income is defined as follows:

Income = Daily expenditure + Monthly expenditure + Saving.

The income calculated from this method includes the income earned from other sources also. Hence the income earned from other sources has been subtracted to get the net income from gada pushing.

$$\text{Income from gada pushing} = [\text{Daily expenditure} + \text{Monthly expenditure} + \text{Saving}] - [\text{income earned from other sources}]$$

The following table shows that most of the *Gada Pushers*, representing to some 70 per cent are having their income below Rs. 750.00 per month. But 30 per cent of the pushers

**Table 13**

**Monthly Income Assessed from an Expenditure Method**

Monthly income group in Rs.	Pushers falling in those group	Percentage
Rs. 150 - 350	0	-
Rs. 350 - 550	10	22.7
Rs. 550 - 750	19	43.2
Rs. 750 - 950	11	25.0
Rs. 950 - and above	4	9.1
Total	44	100

Source: Field Survey.

are having expenditure of more than Rs. 750 a month. Looking at their situation and their living standard this is quite a large amount. This raises some doubts.

Expenditure of more than Rs. 750 a month does not reflect that this much amount is earned from gada pushing only.

Spending of more than Rs. 750 a month do not refer to a single pusher but

the family as a whole. It is the expense incurred to maintain the family staying with him in Kathmandu.

We have to assume that the income supporting Rs. 750 expenditure per month is either earned by *Gada pusher* himself through other works or by his wife and children. Income from other sources could not be identified.

It may also be the case that the *Gada pushers* are supporting this expenditure by borrowing money. The survey data indicates that 30 per cent of the pushers are indebted, which means that they have borrowed in the past.

It is to be noted that *Gada pushers* are having Rs.702.21 average monthly income\*, working for 27.5 days per month and for 10 (in average) hours a day. Income per day varies from Rs. 13.73 to Rs. 35.73 without considering the loss days mentioned earlier. Thus, we find a large variation in income earning. It arises mainly because of the uncertainty in their working opportunities both from demand as well as supply side. This uncertainty is beyond a pusher's control.

### 5.6 Consumption Pattern

During the field investigation and also from general observation it is known that *Gada pushers* have changed their consumption pattern while living in Kathmandu as their money income increased.

As said earlier, *Gada pushers* are having Rs. 702.21 average income per month which may be regarded as a quite higher income if judged from their standard of living. But, they are unable to save more because they spend over 78 per cent of their income on consumption.\*\*

Since most of the pushers are migrants, they have to pay house rent. But out of 44 total pushers, 9 pushers are not paying any rent. They either live with their relatives or take shelter in the public places.\*\*\* Some of them are engaged in household works of the *Sahus* (gada owners or others) and stay there.

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\* Rs. 702.21 is the average monthly income assuming all the income is earned from gada pushing only, other sources of income are not deducted from this figure.

\*\* Consumption includes expenses in two meals a day, expenses in drinking and smoking, other miscellaneous expenses and the rent of gada.

\*\*\* Public places are the houses situated near the temples in the valley like *Patris* and *Pauwas*.



*Gada pushers* are found paying Rs. 16.68 per month\* as house rent which is very low compared to the present house rent conditions in Kathmandu. It indicates a miserable living for them. Monthly expenditure including house rent is 81.39 per cent of the total monthly income. Rest of the income is used in (i) debt payment, (ii) in family support (i.e. sending supplies to their family staying at home).

The following table clearly shows that most of their income (78.87 per cent) is used in consumption. The higher cost of living in Kathmandu and need of adequate diet for being able to push *gadas* appear to be the major reasons. Yet they are running miserable life staying together 4 or 5 persons in a congested and unhygienic room for which they have paid only 2.36 per cent of the total income.

Table 14

## Gada Pushers' Expenditure Pattern per month

Items	Total Expenditure (Rs.)	Average Expen- diture (Rs.)	Percentage to Total
Consumption	24511.30	557.00	78.87
House rent	734.00	16.68	2.36
Entertainment	52.00	1.18	0.16
Debt repayment	690.00	15.68	2.22
Support to family	5090.00	115.68	16.37
Total	81077.30	707.4**	100

Source: Field Survey

## 5.5 Savings and Investments

As Keynes has suggested -

“owing to a fundamental psychological law, as income rose, consumption would

\* Vide table 14.

\*\* Average expenditure Rs. 707.4 per month is more than what is mentioned under income distribution, it is because that here we have included the expenditure made from the income earned by *Gada Pushers* from other sources as well.

rise, but the rise in consumption would (except in very poor countries) be less than the rise in income, because some of the income would be saved."<sup>4</sup>

*Gada pushers* being poor hill dwellers are not saving significantly although, the increase in their income (which they were not earning at all previously) should have made them able to save a significant amount.

The survey data indicate that *Gada pushers* are able to save only about 19 per cent of their monthly income in the following ways.

[a] Debt repayment:

As we have seen 30 per cent of the pushers are indebted. Out of the indebted pushers 92 per cent have repaid some portion of the debt. Average debt repayment is Rs. 15.68 per month.

[b] Support to family:

As most of the pushers are found having their family at their homes. They save some proportion of their income to send to their homes. However, 20.5 per cent of the pushers are found being unable to send any amount. Thus 80 per cent of the pushers are sending money to their families and on the average amount sent back to home is Rs. 115.68 per month.

The *Gada Pushers* do not have any other type of income or expenditure which could be accounted for. They do not have banking habits to save money in Banks nor are they able to buy any durable consumer goods which could be considered as saving.

The savings of *Gada Pushers* are derived of the basis of simple identity equation, that is:

$$S = y - c$$

where,

y = Average income from gada

c = Average expenditure

i. e. consumption.

4 "A Dictionary of Economics", Penguins Publication, 1976 (Reprint of 1973 Edition), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England.

The average income per month Rs. 707.04 and average consumption is Rs. 574.86 and the balance (707.04 - 574.86) Rs. 132.18 is average saving which is not very significant.

Potential saving is also estimated to know whether *Gada Pushers* are incurring unnecessary expenses like expenditure on smoking, drinking alcohol and entertainment (cinema).

The method used to derive the potential saving is as follows:

$$Sp = S + E_n$$

where,

S = Actual saving (average)

$E_n$  = Expenditure in non essentials (average)

Average saving is Rs. 131.36\* and average expenditure in non essentials is Rs. 13.37\*\*. So the saving potential is Rs. 134.73 per month.

### 5.6 Volume of Indebtedness

During the field work an attempt was made to know whether *Gada pushers* were indebted or not. This attempt was made mainly for two reasons. Firstly, to know whether they had taken loan from any lending institutions or not. And secondly, to find out whether indebtedness was also the cause of migration or not.

Out of total *Gada Pushers* only 19.5 per cent responded that they were indebted. By general observation it is known that they have taken loan not from any lending institution but from the individual money lenders. In spite of higher rate of interest they did so because of the easy terms of loan.

It was also found that most of the indebted pushers had been indebted in their villages and some of them had also taken loan in Kathmandu valley from their friends and partners to support their higher cost of living during the time of unemployment.

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\* Average saving is the addition of 4th and 5th item. (Vide table 3:7).

\*\* Average expenditure in non essentials is obtained by deducting expenditure made on drinking and smoking and adding this to item no. 4 i. e. entertainment expenses. (Vide table 3:7).

## 6. AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF GADA PUSHERS

### 6.1 Union

As said earlier *Gada Pushers* are seasonally employed labourers. They are self-employed and fulfil a part of public need for transportation of goods and materials.

Being illiterate they are not aware of the increasing importance of a "Union". No doubt, they are exploited by the gada owners as they have to pay the rent even when they do not get any work. Moreover, the rent of gada which ranges from Rs. 6 to Rs. 10 is quite high.

They are also not supported by the public or any government agencies because there is no standard wage rate fixed for them. Their wage depends upon their bargaining power which is usually very weak - when the bargain is between a villager and an urban dweller, the latter will naturally take the advantage.

Due to the absence of a "Union" they are helpless to do anything for their benefits. They can neither decrease the rental charges nor increase their wage.

### 6.2 Mobility

*Gada Pushers* are less mobile in comparison to other skilled or semi-skilled labourers. As said earlier, *Gada Pushers* are unskilled and uneducated labourers, They neither have any technical knowledge nor any type of training. The only area where they can be absorbed is in the manual works. Hence, work opportunity for them is very limited in the valley.

### 6.3 Existing Rules and Regulation

It is interesting to note that almost nothing has been done to incorporate the gada pushing work in the legal framework as has been done for the factory workers.

### 6.4 Registration of Gada

Gada Registration started since 2023 B. S. (1966) in Kathmandu Town Panchayat Office for the purpose of tax collection. Kathmandu and Lalitpur Town Panchayat Offices are still collecting taxes from the gadas.

Since the year 2030 B. S. (1973) the "Number Plate System" for the gadas was started by the Bagmati Zonal Police Office, in Kathmandu. But this system has

been suspended since the year 2033 B. S. (1976) for some reasons publicly unknown. After this no gadas are registered. Now, there is no any institution for the registration of new gadas and most of the owners even do not pay taxes to the Town Panchayat Offices.

### 6.5 Law about the Rent

As there is no institution to look after, there is no rule regarding the rental charge of gada. The rent of gada is solely determined by the owner. They are free to raise the rent of gada whenever they like to raise. During the field observation it was noted that within the period of 6 years i. e. 2030 to 2035 B. S. (1973-1978), the rent of a "Gada" was increased from Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 6.00 per day. This is 400 per cent increase during a period of 5 years and 80 per cent increase a year.

However, there is no uniformity about the rent of Gada. Gada owners charging the rent differently. Most of the owners are charging Rs. 6.00 per day while some are charging Rs. 6.50 per day and some of them are even charging Rs. 10.00 per day. But the pushers are not getting the due benefit. Some owners have provided their gadas to the pushers free of rent on Saturdays but on that day most of the pushers take leave because of non-availability of work. It is to be noted here that the *Gada Pushers* are employed mostly for the transportation of cement, wood, rods, grains etc. Since, distribution and sale of these materials from government offices and shops are closed on Saturdays, they do not get load on Saturday.

Gada owners do not consider about reducing or not taking the rent even when the pushers do not find any work (trip) that day due to rain or due to some other reasons. Owners charge them as usual. Gada owners collect the rent on weekly basis from the old pushers and on a daily basis from the new ones. If there is a delay in rent payment, they do not give gada to the current pushers for the following days and transfer the work to some this Gada Pushers. Thus, the *Gada Pushers* have to face uncertainty in getting a gada in they are unable to pay the rent in time.

Recently gada owners have started taking some ornaments or some amount of cash as a security deposit from the pushers prior to supplying a gada.

Traffic rules have also become a problem to the pushers as they have to wait 1 to 2



hours in the morning and 1 to 2 hours in the evening to enter certain main areas of the towns of Kathmandu.

These are some of the problems of *Gada Pushers* observed in this field study. There are other problems also, like the problems created by pedestrians, cars and buses drivers and police who treat them in such a way as if the pushers are not the human beings.

## 6.6 Minimum Wage

The Nepal Factory and Factory Workers Act 2016 has classified industrial labourers into four categories. The first category workers are the unskilled ones and the minimum wage for them is fixed at Rs. 200.00<sup>5</sup> a month in 2037 (1978).

Looking at the status of *Gada Pushers* and their nature of work, they fall under category of unskilled labourer. So, they should get at least Rs. 200.00 a month as their minimum wage (one working month consists 26 days in general).

If we compare the average income earned by the pusher as an unskilled worker and the minimum wage fixed by the government, we will find *Gada Pushers* getting more income per month than what is fixed by the government.

Though in monetary terms, *Gada pushers* are getting more income than the unskilled industrial labourers, in real terms they are getting even lower income than the industrial workers. It is because unlike the factory workers they do not enjoy other facilities i. e. medical facilities, children education facilities, leave facilities, holidays, insurance and provident fund facilities etc. unlike the factory workers they do not have the security of permanent work which assure certain income per month as long as they are in service.

Apart from these the pushers' work is very hard and energy consuming. The working hour is very long from early in the morning till the dark evening (more than 12 hours).

As such, even if the pushers are getting more income than what is fixed as the minimum wage for unskilled workers, it cannot be said that they are in a better condition than the workers in industries and firms.

## 6.7 Prospects

After viewing the existing problems of *Gada Pushers*, we can estimate that, if these problems were to remain continue, it will make the condition of *Gada Pusher* the worst in the near future. Among the two groups involved in this work, (i. e. owners and pushers) pusher group will be much more affected, for, the competition among the pushers for gada will help the owners to increase the rent of gada. Gada owners will reap more profit and their monopoly power will be more strong as there is neither a law nor an institution to control their activities. Further, due to the absence of a "Union" the Gada Pushers will neither be able to fix the rate of rent nor can they increase their wage.

Besides, these factors, other social factors like unhealthy like due to the absence of sufficient diet caused by lower income, uncertainty of getting a gada and loads can not be neglected. These problems need to be removed for achieving social justice and raising the living condition of *Gada Pushers* who have been rendering an invaluable service to the society.

## 7. A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Findings

This case study on the employment situation, migration, income distribution and consumption and saving pattern of a low class labourer i. e. the *Gada pushers* of Kathmandu valley has thrown some lights on some aspects of the unskilled labour problem of Kathmandu. The main findings of the survey are highlighted under the following paragraphs.

- (a) Firstly, there is an shortage of studies on the labour problems of various sectors, inspite of the existence of a seperate department of labour under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, research studies and surveys of various catagories of labour and manpower had not yet been undertaken in a systematic way.
- (b) In a country like Nepal, human resources still remain at the top of the priority lists of National Programme. It is therefore evident that the nation should be aware about the problems and the prospects of labour specially that of unskilled ones since over 80 per cent of the country's population are unskilled and illiterate. Various agencies of HMG/Nepal and the Tribhuvan University could initiate, encourage and propagate studies and research relating to the problems and prospects of Nepalese manpower.

- (c) The *Gada Pushers* made their appearance soon after the political change of 2017 B. S. Records in Local Town Panchayat Office show that formal registration of *gada* in Kathmandu started some 13 years ago. This however is the records of vehicles and not of men. Bagmati Zonal Police Office has the record of 340 *gadas* in 2037 B. S. Baisakh. The area covered by their service is very limited falling within the circumference or 28 km. of the Ring Road. Therefore, the frequent encounter of the car drivers and the *Gada pushers* has become a regular feature of Kathmandu streets.
- (d) *Gada Pushers* work on rental *gadas* and they are self employed labourers. Their earning phase of life is limited to their physical strength. It is observed that their working age in this particular profession falls between 15-40 years. No record could be traced about their retired lives.
- (e) Almost all the *Gada pushers* are migrants from neighbouring hills and it seems that there is no any barrier of caste creed or religion for entering into this work. This is obviously a new trend in the socio economic development of Nepal—were there is a strong tradition of division of labour according to castes. For instance the major castes such as Brahmins, Chhetris Baisyas and Sudras are directly related to specific job categories.
- (f) The survey of economic behaviour was based mainly on the expenditure aspect. This tends to inflate the figure in contrast to the income assessment approach which tends to be much more conservative. The figures are truly based on the responses of individual labourers. It is estimated that each *Gada pushers* earn Rs. 702 per month. This is apparently a high figure which comes to the equivalence of the money income of a HMG, third class Technical Officer. However, it is to be noted that the life-style of a *Gada Pusher* and the amount of saving presents an unbelievable contrast with that of a regular officer.
- (g) It has been observed that about 80 per cent of the earning (Rs. 574/- per month) is spent on daily consumption and shelter and the remaining portion is sent back home to support their family and to repay their old debts. This meagre support in terms of money is much valuable to the hill dwellers. The money is generally spent in items like salt, kerosine, spices and sometimes in utensils and clothings.
- (h) The saving of their income and the existing facilities of shelter and security (health) are coupled with very unsecured type of life for the *Gada Pushers*. They lead a *bird life* searching for everyday meals. This is also reflected in the volum of indebtedness while living in the city. More than 30 per cent of the pushers are in debt.

- (i) At present there is no any organisation to enforce rules, regulations or laws regarding gada pushing work. Besides, there is not any institution or organisation to safeguard the pushers' interest.
- (j) Alternative jobs available for *Gada Pushers* are limited to certain kinds of manual work such as porter, coolie etc. Lack of opportunities for better jobs has compelled them to stick to the gada pushing work.

## 7.2 Recommendations for Policy Implication

The observations pinpointed in the preceding paragraphs have impelled to make some recommendations regarding the *Gada Pushers* and their jobs.

- (1) There should be an institution for the registration of the *Gadas* and for the collection of taxes etc.
- (2) The Department of Labour should enforce rules regulations and laws to safeguard the interest of these self-employed labourers. The Department should also try to maintain a balance between the demand and supply of gada pushing work.
- (3) There should be some rules and regulation for the movement of *gadas* in the busy traffic time. The site of their traffic and parking should also be specified. Besides, the maximum load and the volume of goods per vehicle should be fixed by some agency to ensure their easy movement also to safeguard the health of the pushers.
- (4) Services rendered by the *Gada pushers* are quite satisfactory. Fixation of rates on some scientific basis particularly by taking into consideration of weight and distance could lead to better service from them. Arrangement of the organisation of their own may be the solutions of their problems regarding wage, working areas and rent.
- (5) Some scheme of providing credit to the pushers to own a gada should be thought. The commercial banks should explore the possibilities of extending loans to the *Gada pushers* to buy their own *gadas*.
- (6) Feasibility studies should be done to assess the service of existing *gadas* and also to assess the capacity of the city to absorb more labourers in this work.
- (7) The *Gada pushers* and other labourers of this kind should be looked after by some welfare organisation specially in their problems of health-hygiene insurance and also of legal problems,



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