

Internal and International Migration in Nepal

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INTERNAL MIGRATION

Nepal has been experiencing an increasing volume of internal migration with the control of endemic malaria in the Tarai and Inner Terai areas since the early fifties. The 1952/54 Census recorded 216,853 persons as being absent from home for more than 6 months. This absentee population constituted 2.6 percent of the total population. Out of this absentee population only 13,730 persons (6.3 percent) were residing outside the region of their birth (Table 1). Only 2.3 percent of the total absentee population was residing within their own region of birth and 91.4 percent had migrated outside the country.

Out of the migrants residing in other regions, 82.8 percent had originated from the Mountain and Hills. The Tarai had 39.7 percent of the immigrants whereas the Kathmandu Valley had 55.9 percent of the total immigrants.

The 1961 Census recorded 422,402 persons as being absent from their place of birth for more than 6 months. Of these life-time migrants, 178,437 persons (42.2 percent) were residing outside their region of birth and the remaining were residing within the same region. Of these interregional migrants, 74.2 percent was originated from the Mountain and Hills.

The Tarai absorbed 74.3 percent of the immigrants while the Kathmandu Valley absorbed 13.9 percent. Majority of these migrants (85,398 or 47.9 percent) originated from the Eastern Mountain and Hill. The Mountain and Hill had a net loss of 111,204 migrants while the Tarai and the Kathmandu Valley had net gains of 106,587 and 4,617 migrants respectively. High gains of the migrants in the Tarai were largely from the high loss areas in the Hills.

The 1971 Census recorded 506,921 persons living in regions other than their region of birth. The volume of interregional migration in 1971 increased almost by three fold over the 1961 volume. The Mountain and Hill had a net loss of 380,881 (87.4 percent) migrants. The Kathmandu Valley had also lost 19,044 migrants. The Tarai was the gainer of 399,925 migrants and was the recipient of 82.5 percent of all the immigrants in Nepal. Compared to the 1961 situation, the migrants from the Mountain and Hill in 1971, were increasingly concentrated to central and western part of the country.

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Table 1
Interregional Migration in Nepal, 1952/54-1981

Régions

Census Year	Mountain/Hills	Kathmandu Valley	Tarai	Total
<u>1952/54</u>				
In-migrants	602 (4.4)	7678 (55.9)	5450 (39.7)	13730 (100.0)
Out-migrants	11371 (82.8)	1460 (10.6)	899 (6.5)	13730 (100.0)
Net-migrants	-10769	+6218	+4551	0
<u>1961</u>				
In-migrants	21176 (11.9)	24748 (13.9)	132513 (74.3)	178437 (100.0)
Out-migrants	132380 (74.2)	20131 (11.3)	25916 (14.5)	178437 (100.0)
Net-migrants	-111204	+4617	+106587	0
<u>1971</u>				
In-migrants	62046 (12.2)	26440 (5.2)	418435 (82.5)	506921 (100.0)
Out-migrants	442927 (87.4)	45484 (9.0)	18510 (3.7)	506921 (100.0)
Net-migrants	-380881	-19044	+399925	0
<u>1981</u>				
In-migrants	265555 (25.6)	-	773925 (74.4)	1038862 (100.0)
Out-migrants	951731 (91.6)	-	87129 (8.4)	1038862 (100.0)
Net-migrants	-686178	-	+686178	0

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

Sources: Censuses of 1952/54, 1961, 1971, and 1981.

The 1981 Census recorded 1,038,662 persons residing outside their regions of birth. In 1981, Nepal also had 1,272,288 persons or 8.5 percent residing outside their districts of birth thus indicating a higher mobility increases compared to those of the earlier censuses. Of these total mobile population, 233,426 persons had moved within their own regions of birth. The Mountain and Hill had a net loss of 686,178 persons all going into the Tarai. Out of the total immigrants the Tarai had 74.4 percent whereas the Mountain and Hill had 91.6 percent of the out-migrants. Eastern Mountain and Hill together accounted for 48.3 percent of the total out-migrants (Table 2). Eastern and Central Tarai together had gained 65.1 percent of the net-migration. Most migrants in the different Tarai sub-regions were from the adjoining Mountain and Hill districts. Majority of the migrants from the Eastern and Western Mountain regions crossed over their adjoining Hill regions and migrated to immediate Tarai sub-regions. The increasing influx of the Mountain and Hill migrants into the Tarai poses problems of how many people the Tarai can absorb on the basis of its resources.

RURAL-TO-URBAN MIGRATION

The 1981 Census did not include data on rural to urban migration. The 1971 Census, however, did include data on rural-to-urban migration in 16 urban centers. Out of 461,938 urban population in 1971, 61,748 (13.4 percent) were considered rural-to-urban migrants. Non-migrants constituted of 78.2 percent, and foreign migrants to urban areas were 8.4 percent (Table 3).

The Tarai had a total urban population of 161,837, out of which rural-to-urban migrants and foreign migrants respectively constituted of 22.1 and 20.2 percent. The Kathmandu Valley, out of its total urban population, had 7.5 percent rural-to-urban migrants and the foreign migrants constituted of only 2.0 percent. The Hill also had 14.2 percent rural-to-urban migrants with foreign migrants constituting of only 2.3 percent.

Out of the total rural-to-urban migrants of 61,748 the Tarai towns absorbed 58.0 percent while the Kathmandu Valley towns and the Hill towns respectively absorbed 30.4 and 11.6 percent. Majority of the migrants (56.5 percent) originating in the Mountain went to the Kathmandu Valley. The Tarai had 63.7 percent of the migrants originating in the Hill and 59.4 percent of the migrants originating from the Kathmandu Valley. The Kathmandu Valley had 58.3 percent of the migrants originating from the Tarai (Table 4).

The rural-to-urban migration pattern was similar to the overall internal migration pattern in Nepal. Each of the 16 urban centers had attracted majority of the rural migrants from the immediate Hill and Mountain region thus conforming the hypothesis that rural-to-urban migration also increased with decreasing distance. For example, Nepalganj had majority of migrants originating from the Western Hill while the other Tarai towns had majority of migrants originating from their neighbouring Hill areas in the north. The Kathmandu Valley had migrants almost equally from the Tarai and the Mountain but an overwhelming majority (71.8 percent) from the Hills, especially, from the Eastern and Central Hill (81 percent of the Hill total).

Table 2
Interregional Migration, 1981

Regions	In-migrants		Out-migrants		Net-migration	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<u>Mountain</u>	53,628	5.2	315,095	30.3	261,467	-38.0
Eastern	23,907	2.3	235,987	22.7	-212,080	-38.8
Central	10,425	1.0	21,736	2.1	-11,311	- 1.7
Western	1,080	0.1	38,219	3.7	-37,139	- 5.4
Mid-western	7,330	0.7	5,912	0.6	1,418	0.2
Far-western	10,886	1.4	13,241	1.3	-2,355	- 0.3
<u>Hill</u>	211,927	20.4	636,638	61.3	-424,711	-61.8
Eastern	31,423	3.0	265,360	25.5	-233,937	-34.0
Central	71,873	6.9	119,275	11.5	-47,402	- 6.9
Western	62,572	6.0	150,104	14.4	-87,532	-12.7
Mid-western	31,500	3.0	54,528	5.2	-23,028	- 3.3
Far-western	14,559	1.4	47,371	4.6	-32,812	- 4.8
<u>Tarai</u>	773,307	74.4	87,129	8.4	686,178	99.8
Eastern	300,835	29.0	38,955	3.7	261,880	38.1
Central	214,473	20.6	29,053	2.8	185,420	27.0
Western	111,435	10.7	4,672	0.4	106,763	15.5
Mid-western	54,364	5.2	13,238	1.3	41,126	6.1
Far-western	92,200	8.9	1,211	0.1	90,989	13.2
Total	1,038,862	100.0	1,038,862	100.0	0	100.0

Source: Census, 1981, Table 8.

Table 3
Proportion of Urban-migrants to Non-migrants

Regions	Urban-migrants	Immigrants	Non-migrants	Total
Hill	7165 (14.2)	1165 (2.3)	42208 (83.5)	50538 (100.0)
Kathmandu Valley	18749 (7.5)	5012 (2.0)	225802 (90.5)	249563 (100.0)
Tarai	35834 (22.1)	32703 (20.2)	93300 (57.7)	161837 (100.0)
Total	61748 (13.4)	38880 (8.4)	361310 (78.2)	461938 (100.0)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Source: National Commission on Population, 1984: 51-52.

Table 4
Interregional Urban-migrants, 1971

Regions	Mountain	Hill	Kathmandu Valley	Tarai	Total
Hill	312 (4.3) (7.0)	1224 (17.1) (3.0)	4905 (68.5) (40.6)	724 (10.1) (15.3)	7165 (100.0) (11.6)
Kathmandu Valley	2535 (3.5) (56.5)	13457 (71.8) (33.3)	-	2757 (14.7) (58.3)	18749 (100.0) (30.4)
Tarai	1637 (4.5) (36.5)	25786 (72.0) (63.7)	7163 (20.0) (59.4)	1248 (3.5) (26.4)	35834 (100.0) (58.0)
Total	4487 (7.3) (100.0)	40467 (65.5) (100.0)	12068 (19.5) (100.0)	4729 (7.7) (100.0)	61748 (100.0) (100.0)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Source: National Commission on Population, 1984: 51-52.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Emigration

In 1941, the number of immigrants was 81,817. It increased to 198,120 in the 1952/54 Census and to 328,470 in the 1961 Census. According to the 1952/54 Census, 79.4 percent of the total emigrants went to India (Table 5). In 1961, the emigrants going to India only constituted 92.0 percent of the total emigrants. The total emigrants in the 1952/54

Table 5.
Magnitude of Emigration in Nepal

Country	1952/54		1961		Total Change	% Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
India	157,323	79.4	302,162	92.0	144,839	92.1
Malaya	6,621	3.3	12,798	3.9	6,177	93.3
Burma	1,842	0.9	3,025	0.9	1,183	64.2
China	442	0.2	809	0.2	387	91.7
Pakistan	153	0.1	100	0.0	-53	-34.6
Others	31,759	16.0	9,576	2.9	22,183	-69.8
Total	198,120	100.0	328,470	100.0		65.8

Source: Census 1952/54 and 1961.

Census constituted 2.3 percent and in the 1961 Census, 3.3 percent of the total population.¹ The Indian Census of 1971 recorded 486,600 emigrants of Nepal.² The 1981 Census recorded 402,977 or 2.7 percent of the total population as being outside the country. Most of the emigrants in 1981 were males and of younger age group. Male emigrants constituted 80.0 percent while 60 percent was within the age group 15-34 years. Emigration was mostly because of obtaining service and education in the foreign countries.

Immigration

A sizeable number of immigrants is residing within Nepal. In 1961, the number of immigrants was 337,620 or 3.6 percent of the total population of Nepal. This number was slightly reduced to 337,448 in 1971, the number of immigrants residing in the Tarai was 92.3 percent of the total immigrants while this percentage was slightly low (91.3 percent) in 1971. Of the total immigrants in 1961, India-born immigrants were 96.0 percent. Out of the total Indian-born population of 324,159, the Tarai absorbed 95.2 percent.³

In 1961, the total number of foreign citizens was 110,061. It increased to 136,477 in 1971. The Tarai had 89.6 percent of the total foreign citizens in both 1961 and 1971.

A survey conducted in 1983 revealed that the Tarai had 418,748 immigrants out of which 89.0 percent was concentrated in Eastern and Central Tarai only.⁴ The survey also reported that the annual growth of immigrants was 4.5 percent per year since 1958.

The results of this survey can be substitute for 1981 misreporting of immigrants in Nepal. In 1981, the number of foreign citizens was reported to be 483,019 as against 136,477 in 1971. The foreign born population, however, was reported to be only 238,593 which was much lower than the 1971 figure of 337,448 immigrants. The number of foreign born population being much smaller than the number of foreign citizens is hard to explain in the 1981 Census.

CAUSES OF INTERNAL MIGRATION

1. Control of Malaria. The control of endemic malaria in the Tarai and Inner Tarai has been largely responsible for the Hill migration into the Tarai.
2. Agriculture and Trade. The 1981 Census identified 30.0 percent of all the internal migration was for agricultural purposes followed by trade (14.5 percent) and marriage (11.6 percent).⁵ This indicated that rural-to-rural migration was significant.
3. Resettlement and Infrastructure. Government policy of resettlement and other infrastructure and development activities in the Tarai were also responsible for the Hill migration into the Tarai.

In addition to these three main reasons for out-migration from the Hills to the Tarai, many research in the past have reported the following.

4. Push Factors of the Hill. Some of the important push factors of the Hill were reported as lack of employment opportunities, population pressure, inadequate land, inadequate food, landslide, erosion, increasing debt, low productivity, poverty, and lack of development. The survey conducted by National Commission on Population (NCP) in 1983 reported that out of 1673 migrant households of the Tarai 52.0 percent indicated inadequate food in the Hills. Other reasons were: inequality (62.0 percent), poverty (58.0 percent), lack of development (29.0 percent), natural calamity (6.0 percent), inadequate ownership of land (39.0 percent), and lack of employment opportunities (14.0 percent). These push factors were indicative of the Hill situation as experienced or perceived by the Tarai migrants migrating from the Hill.
5. Pull Factors of the Tarai. The Tarai migrants indicated the following reasons for migrating into the Tarai: resettlement programme (42.0 percent), industry, trade, investment and drinking water (67.0 percent), better living conditions than in the Hills (84.0 percent), better pasture land (54.0 percent), availability of fuelwood (68.0 percent), friends and relatives (32.0 percent), food availability (11.0 percent), cheap land (7.0 percent), and convenience for marketing (6.0 percent). Almost 84.0 percent of the migrants indicated the situation in the Tarai better than they had in the Hills. Majority of the migrants placed higher importance to drinking water, living conditions (housing), pasture conditions, land availability, and fuelwood availability. These were the factors that they were lacking

in the Hills and that other factors were relatively less important for the Tarai migrants.

CAUSES OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

All the causes for emigration are similar to the ones indicated for internal migration. The pull factors in the foreign lands were: attractive salary and facility, more employment opportunity, marital relation, free environment, better education, health facilities, and protection of assets.

The push factors indicated by immigrants were similar to many of the factors the Hill migrants of the Tarai indicated. Some of the important push factors indicated by immigrants were: communal riots, lack of peace, inadequate employment, population growth, declining economic conditions, and family tensions and quarrels. The pull factors of Nepal and especially the Tarai were: business in agriculture and wood-products, lack of skilled and semi-skilled laborers in Nepal, open border, social, cultural, and religious ties, peace, stable political conditions, foreign aided projects, easy to have citizenship certificates, flexibility of Nepalese law, free currency exchange, and Nepalese people's goodwill towards foreigners. Moreover, the NCP report pointed out that out of a total of 418,748 foreigners, 49.0 percent came to Nepal for employment especially in the urban areas. Almost 20.0 percent of the total immigrants came to Nepal for trade and business followed by suffering in their origin (12.0 percent).

CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Major consequences of internal migration have been on land utilization pattern of both the Hills and the Tarai forest depletion in the Tarai between 1927 and 1977 has been phenomenal. Within this period, a 59 percent decrease in the Tarai forest has taken place.⁶ The absolute decrease has been 853,511 hectares, from 1,441,948 hectares in 1927 to 588,438 hectares in 1977. Ecological imbalance in the Tarai must have been augmented because of increasing thin cover of the forest. Between 1961 and 1981, the population of the Tarai increased by 119 percent. The total forest area in the Tarai in 1964, however, was 54.0 percent and reduced to 18.0 percent in 1977. This has caused a great change in the relationship between population and land utilization in the Tarai. Population density has also increased tremendously over time. The consequences are forest encroachment, land acquisition, increase in the number of landless people,⁷ lack of social services, increased price of land.

Because of increasing outmigration, the Hills have also suffered from mismanagement of land, lack of labour force and investment. Although the Tarai has been absorbing excess population of the Hills for some time and will continue to do so for some time to come, the Tarai eventually cannot support majority of the population of Nepal nor can the Hill support its ever growing population in terms of its exploitable resources.

Internal migration is indicative of the immense disparity in resource availability and development among regions. If the internal migration is properly managed, it will be an effective instrument for adjusting resources and population.

A small country like Nepal with limited resources must impose restriction on the influx of immigrants as well. A substantial portion of migrant's income is used for consumption rather than in capital accumulation. An indulgence in comfortable life has prompted them to employ immigrants in agriculture and other activities. The overwhelming growth of population in the Tarai also meant increasing pressure on health, education as well as drinking water facilities. Continued more investment in the Tarai means continued languish in the Hills. The carrying capacity of the resources of both the Hills and the Tarai is waning and to this extent more aggressive population controlling mechanism accompanied by population redistribution policy is urgently called for.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bal Kumar K.C., "Nature and Problems of Internal and International Migration in Nepal" (in Nepali) in National Commission on Population, Population Education in Nepal (Kathmandu: HMG, National Commission on Population, 1984), p. 192.
2. Government of India, 1971 Census of India, Series 1 India, Special Monograph Number 1, Birthplace Migration in India, Section 3, Population Classified by Place of Birth (New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General, 1974).
3. Bal Kumar K.C., Op. cit., Footnote No. 1, p. 193.
4. National Commission on Population, Internal and International Migration in Nepal (Kathmandu: HMG, National Commission on Population, 1983).
5. Harka Gurung, Nepal: Dimensions of Development (Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press, 1984), p. 37.
6. Ibid., p. 232.
7. Bal Kumar K.C., "The Rural to Rural Migration in Nepal", Occasional Papers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol.2, 1985), pp. 1-19.