

## **Examining the Socio-economic Viewpoint of Nepalese Women Residing in Tokyo, Japan: A Study on Women's Migration to Japan**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to determine the push factors and the pull factors driving Nepalese women to choose to work in Japan. It commonly occurs because of the push factor of fewer opportunities in the socio-economic situation and also because of pull factors in more developed areas. This study's general objective is to determine the socio-economic structure of female migrants from Nepal. Similarly, it also attempts to analyze the reasons, role, impact, and process of female migration, and the dynamics of foreign migration. This study adopts the qualitative design; data collection was done by interviewing 150 women and two focus group discussions (FGD) each of 10 informants in each group of 18-45 years old. The finding shows most importantly two types of factors: push and pull factors drive female migration. The finding indicates that poverty, unemployment, unequal wages, less importance of their role in the household, discrimination, poor health care, oppression, and socio-cultural barriers are the main push factors of female migration. More opportunities, equality, good education and health, high wages, technology, family and networks, safety and freedom, and empowerment through knowledge and income are the pull factors of Nepalese females.

**Keywords:** migration, women migration, economic factors, social factors

### **Introduction**

Migration, which can be defined as the spatial movement of human beings between one geographical part and another, is part of human beings throughout the history of civilization. Delineation of international and national policies led to the differentiation of such migration as either international or domestic migration. Migration can be temporary or permanent. Economic, demographic, and technological improvements have boosted the flow of migrants in the globalizing world. Migrations in the world have taken place for various purposes e.g., employment, education, business,

travel, and many more. Migration is a global phenomenon and is particularly common in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Around 3.60% of the global population, i.e., 281 million, were international migrants in 2021, of whom more than half (169 million) were migrant workers (International Organization for Migration. 2022). The fluid movement of people across and within borders has intensified following the turbulence and change occurring in multiple directions under globalization (Arya and Roy, 2006, pp.19-48).

The formal migration of Nepalese people started in 1815. The treaty between Amar Singh Thapa and General David Ochterlony in Malaun (now in India) during the Anglo-Gorkha War paved the way for a tradition that has lasted almost 200 years (Khanduri, 1997a, p. 110; Khanduri, 1997b, p. 196). In the last two decades, the number of migrants has increased rapidly. The most common reason to migrate for females is economic. Women often seek work opportunities elsewhere to improve their family's economic status. Beyond the economic purpose, migration also allows to escape social discrimination, gender inequalities, and sexual and gender-based violence, and migration also provides to enlarge the knowledge and capacity of women which helps them to find more decent work opportunities.

Women migration depends on women's social roles, their autonomy and capacity to make decisions, their access to resources, the opinion of their families towards them, and the existing gender stratification in countries of origin and destination. The lack of economic opportunity in their country is a significant explanation for why females are migrating abroad for work. Poverty, different social barriers, lack of decent economic opportunities, and violence are the root causes of the increasing number of women in foreign employment (Luna and Islam, 2014). Poverty along with the growing inequality in the society of Nepal has led females to go for foreign employment for better prospects of life even if they have to education, training, information, and language skills. Even in such conditions, they are managing to work in different sectors in Japan. Most of them came to Japan on a spouse visa because of their husband and some of them came here on other categories of visas. Nepalese women's income helps them to improve their social and financial status in their families and society. Thus, this research examines the impact of socio-economic factors of migration on Nepalese women in Japan.

## Background

Japan is a popular destination for Nepalese migrants. About 97,109 Nepalese were residing in Japan in 2021, the country's largest South Asian community. As Table No. 1 shows from 2010 to 2021, there has been a threefold increase in the number of Nepalese in Japan. A majority of the Nepalese is a family stay visa holders with 32,229, technical specialist in humanity service with 19,406, followed by student status with 16,858 and 12,112 as skilled labour (cook) in Indo-Nepali restaurant under legal status. This study examined the factors associated with socio-economics and some other determinants of Nepalese women migrants to Japan. The given below table shows the number of Nepalese people living in Japan during different periods.

**Table 1**

*Nepalese People Living in Japan: 2021–1986*

Year	Total	Male	Female	Percentage(F)
2021	97,109	55,744	41,365	42.59
2018	88,951	52,783	36,168	40.66
2015	54,775	36,164	18,611	33.97
2012	24,071	15,883	8,188	34.01
2009	15,255	10,779	4,476	29.34
2006	7,844	5,528	2,316	29.52
2000	3,649	2,716	933	25.56
1995	1,314	1,003	311	23.66
1990	447	346	101	22.59
1986	248	182	66	26.61

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), 2022.

## Statement of Problem

Before the 1970s most scholars studied and researched the phenomenon of migration in general, but after the 1970s, scholars have made attempts to understand migration from a gender perspective. Similarly, female migrants only began to receive more scholarly attention after the 1980s in the research field. It is important to analyse migration from a gender perspective to gain a deeper understanding of female migrants,

who have often been analysed in the same context as male migrants. In recent years women's migration to Japan has been increasing main source of income and strong social status.

This study attempts to investigate and understand socio-economic as the push and pull factors of Nepalese women's migration to Japan. How the social and economic factors with other sub-factors drive the trend of migration and make the situation for coming to Japan. Hence, the kind of important role from both a family perspective and a societal perspective is analysed and examined from the respondent's views. Looking at the trends and number of women coming to Japan, it is important to study migration from women's perspectives. In general, the main factors of migration, and its impact on them along with their families are to study. Therefore, this study focuses on various reasons for migration from both aspects (push and pull) and will be investigated through different processes. Migration impends national, economic, and human security. The policies need to be comprehensive and dynamic to shape migration

### **Significance of the Study**

This study attempts to understand and analyse women's migration from a socio-economic perspective on their lives. It is a case study of Tokyo from a subjective and objective point of view. This study explores the direct impact of socio-economic context on migration, but also its indirect impact on perceptions and representations of women regarding migration. The purpose of this research is to explore the question of movement by viewing migration processes from an economic and societal perspective. In particular, to study why Nepalese women migrate to Japan and what causes and impacts it has had on their lives.

The role and impact of the society and their economic status are also analysed from both the informant's perspective as well as the general perspective. One purpose of this research is to contribute empirically to finding an alternative to migration by providing information for all these factors like government and non-government agencies to implement and monitor their projects related to migration. As a consequence, this research can be helpful to policymakers, I/NGOs, and amateur academics who want to work and study in the domain of migration from a socio-economic perspective.



## **Objectives**

This study is an attempt to understand the better phenomenon of women's migration. It intends to inquire into General objectives as pull and push factors of Nepalese women migrating to Japan. Specifically, the objectives of the study are: -

- To investigate the impact of the socio-economic situation on Nepalese women migrants to Japan.
- To identify the women's attitude towards migration in Japan.

## **Research questions**

To attain the objectives, the paper deals with the following research questions:

- What factors are responsible for Nepalese women's migration to Japan?
- How do the economic and social factors play a role as pull and push factors in women's migration?
- What kind of impact do the family and society have from women's migration?

## **Delimitation of the study**

The study aims to explain Nepalese women's migration to Japan from the socio-economic perspective. The situation and process are not very different for other countries either, however, the findings of this study will be considered with the sample, methods, and universe of the study. For all this purpose, the Tokyo metropolitan of Japan is selected as a research area. The study selects 150 females as a sample for the complementation of this research.

## **Literature Review**

This part of the study is compiled from different sources which include the national report, statistics, and research reports done by other national and international scholars and organizations, relatively that are relevant to this study. The phenomenon of human migration has been in existence since the beginning of human existence. Migration is understood as the permanent change in residence for individuals. Everett Lee theorized that migration is selective and is influenced by pull and push factors (Faridi, 2018).

### **Social Factors of Migration**

There are a lot of social factors that drive internal and external migration. Morrison et al. (2007, pp.1-10) also consider women's empowerment as one of the determinants of female migration, however, gender equality determines migration of women to the extent that higher gender equality is associated with higher wages for women. Furthermore, As Boyd stated (2006, pp. 29-34), the push factors of women's migration include one more important factor, which is gender equality or women's empowerment. Women migrate for their responsibility towards family and lots of social reasons (Hamal Gurung, 2015 pp.37-45). However, the migration journeys of educated women, which also include elements of feminization and individual agency, are excluded from this discourse (Kofman, 2012). As Bourdieu explains, change occurs in various forms and can be durable. Regarding the changes in gender roles, women acquire education, employment, and social sphere, all of which yield real changes in their lived experiences (Nentwich et al., 2014). The micro factors are educational status, marital status, and personal attitude to making migration decisions an individual choice (Castelli, 2018. pp. 1-7). A study conducted in Nepal has shown foreign employment is not a preferred choice of households but is primarily the decision of the individual to go for foreign employment rather than remain unemployed and economically insecure at home (Sharma, 2019, pp. 112-128). Migration enabled women to gain knowledge and understanding of the world by living in a foreign country, learning another language, and doing different work beyond their domestic spheres, such as tailoring and beauty therapy, and others (Shrestha al. et., 2020, pp. 1- 12). Marital problems and gender discrimination, serve as “push” factors that inspire women to seek job opportunities for work outside of Nepal (Peskin, 2016). There is evidence from South-East Asia of women migrating to escape from involuntary marriages (Lam and Hoang, 2010). A recent contribution by Hofman and Buckley (2013), stresses the possible negative role of social norms in limiting migration opportunities for women.

### **Economic Factors of Migration**

According to Zanabazar et al. (2021, pp. 01023), various pull and push factors influence migration. For instance, the pull factors influencing migration include economic factors such as employment opportunities, better shelter, and higher standards of living. Koczan et al. (2021, pp. 1-27 also agree that migration to higher-income countries is

intended by the wish for better income as well as expected earnings for offspring. But push factors are at least as important as pull factors: the main push factors are unemployment (Carbajal and Calvo 2021; Khalid and Urbanski 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2019. Wickramasekara, 2016, pp. 99-129), poverty (low standards of living in general: lack of food and shelter, etc.) (ibid.) and, overpopulation (Ibrahim et al., ibid.). For example, for Wickramsekara (ibid.), poverty and unemployment are the main drivers of migration from South Asian countries to Gulf countries. Macroeconomic conditions at home have been one of the determinants according to several studies (Simpson, 2017, pp. 5). In the last few decades, the number of migrant people has increased from 4 to 9% of the population of advanced economics which has generated strong social and political reactions that have attention to the phenomenon in advanced countries (IMF WEO, 2020).

In the existing literature, many scholars have studied the phenomenon of migration since the 1970s. After decades of ignorance and denial, women were finally included in the literature on migration. Scott and Tilly (along with the students they influenced) focused on the lives of women migrating from the subsistence-oriented European countryside to industrializing, urban communities in Europe and the United States (Smith, 1985; Cohen, 1993). John Bodnar's 'The Transplanted' (1985), contributed to an understanding of immigrant wage earning (Suzanne M. Sinke, 2006, pp.86). The present study is important for a lot of reasons. Firstly, most studies on migration are focused on men and only a few studies have been done on Nepalese women migration, most of them focusing on Gulf countries and European countries. Few researchers have researched various subjects such as their health, their education, their journey, remittance, and many more on Nepalese migrants to Japan. This study will explore specifically the Nepalese migrant women to Japan from the socio-economic perspective.

## Methodology

### Description of the Research Area

Tokyo metropolitan area has been purposefully selected for the study. This city is leading in the number of Nepalese female migrants in Japan. 26,420 Nepalese people are living here in 2022 data. Also, I have been living here for the last 5 years which makes it

a little easy to convene the informants. Therefore, I selected it for this research. This area shows Nepalese women in various occupations and different sectors as a livelihood strategy. This research will show that socio-economic factors have been playing a prominent role in migrations to Japan. For this purpose, it is focused on the female migration from the different parts of Nepal and its various reasons.

### **Nature of Research**

I used a mixed-method research approach by collecting data through a brief survey of key informants and focus group discussions (FGD) with female migrants. And secondary sources (archival data, news articles, published research work, and government documents). The research was held in different parts with a total of 120 key informants. The brief survey, which makes up the major portion of the data, was utilized mainly to understand the respondents' perceptions and experiences. And, two FGD group discussions were organized, where 1 group consisted of 10 women. The FGD was also utilized to understand their view on the social perception of female migration, and also to uncover the socio-economic impact of migration on the lives of female workers and their families. The tools used in this research were interview sheets arranged by the researchers with semi-open questions that aimed to assist the informants in understanding the questions and for the informants to provide suitable answers. A voice recorder was used to document the research activities with the permission of the informants.

### **Focus Group Discussion**

I spent five months collecting data (interviews and FGD) from different locations in Tokyo. For FGD 20 informants (for 2 FGD) were selected of which 5 were students, 6 were dependents, 4 were refugee visa status holders and 5 were having a higher level or more education in Nepal. The interviews and FGD with the female migrants were organized in two different places in Tokyo. One was organized in an Indo-Nepalese restaurant near Kokubunji station on February 10th, 2022, and another was organized in the Shinjuku Chuo Park near Shinjuku on March 3rd, 2022.

I used my contacts and took help from my friends and relatives to collect the data. With the help of friends and relatives, the initial contacts were established, and I scheduled interviews and FGD. The interviews with these key informants spanned

between 30 to 45 minutes and around 60 minutes were spanned for each FGD. All structured and unstructured questionnaires were developed in a written schedule.

### **Sampling**

150 women at the age range of 18 to 45 years old, who came to Japan for work and had lived here for at least 1 year were selected through a snowball sampling to complete this study between January 15th and March 25th, 2022. I approached 200 informants but 50 didn't agree with the study for their reason which was not disclosed. Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used in the selection of the study population. While the initial survey participants were identified with the help of some key informants, the subsequent research participants were usually referred by the earlier respondents.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

For all the respondents the predetermined questions were implemented through the structured interview. The interview involved fixed and alternative questions for the certification of the subject that provide a basis for the collection of information that is related to the study. Interview and FDG were organized and completed in Nepalese language, as is the native language of both informants and researcher. And, for the FGD unstructured interview was administered. All 20 informants were selected from 150 informants based on their education and visa status to complete the paper. Before starting the process of data collection, all the informants were informed about the research, its purpose, significance, and researcher details for their convenience. Verbal consent with informants was approved before the procedure. They were given enough time for their opinion and were allowed to draw their responses before the finalization of manuscripts. All the data were translated into the English language for the completion of the study. All the collected data and information were processed and analysed in descriptive and statistical ways in different forms (i.e., tables, and charts).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Demographic Characteristics of Women**

As mentioned above (part: introduction, background) both local and global

migration is accustomed to the people of Nepal. The mobilization of Nepalese women began in the 1970s in Japan. In this section, female migrants' demographic characteristics, i.e., age, marital status, religion, and education qualification are discussed. The table below shows the demographic details of the women living in Japan that I interviewed.

**Table 2**

*Demographic Details of the Women Living in Japan*

<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18-30 years	53	35.33
30-40 years	78	52
Above 40 years	19	12.66
<b>Marital status</b>		
Unmarried	28	18.66
Married	119	79.33
No response	3	2
<b>Ethnicity/caste</b>		
Newars	28	18.66
Magars	37	24.66
Chhetri	63	42
Tharu	5	3.33
Others	17	11.33
<b>Visa status</b>		
Student	27	18
Dependent	89	59.33
Working	16	10.66
Refugee	11	7.33
Long-term	7	4.66



<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Length of stay in Japan</b>		
1-3 years	44	29.33
3-7 years	82	54.66
Above 7 years	24	16
<b>Education level</b>		
Up to upper primary	43	28.66
Higher secondary level	69	46
University level	38	25.33
<b>Japanese language skill</b>		
Basic level	111	74
Intermediate level	35	23.33
Advance level	4	2.66
<b>Occupation in Nepal</b>		
Farmer	68	45.33
Housewife	12	8
Student <sup>3</sup>	34	22.66
Public servant	0	0
Private job	15	10
Factory worker	7	4.66
Business	14	9.33

Source: Field Survey, 2022

As the above data has shown the age group of 18-40 women is in huge numbers in Japan. According to their answer, these women came here to increase their income and livelihood. A majority of them came here after their marriage in family visa status. 18% of females came here for study purposes. 46% of women have passed their higher education in Nepal. Most Nepalese women were working in agriculture before coming to

Japan. And, 74% of women have only a basic Japanese language level which means most of them are unable to communicate in this language wherever they need it.

**Table 3**

*Main Reasons for Migration*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Alleviation of household poverty	57	38
Social reasons	41	27.33
Family reunification and other reasons	13	8.66
Better earning opportunity	18	12
Better education	7	4.66
A better lifestyle for the family in future	9	6
Others	5	3.33
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

An important part of the informants 38% stated economics as the main reason for migration for them. Lack of income source, unemployment of the members of their house, and huge size of the family motivate them to migrate. 27.33% of the females opined about the social reasons for the migration. Discrimination, inequality, early marriage, poor health, oppression, religious tolerance, low social status, and less importance of their role in household work are among the social factors for their migration. Few of them were in a way “forced” to migrate to Japan, for social reasons, either by their family (husband) already living in Japan.

**Push Factors for Migration**

The majority of women migrate as workers or with their families, driven by economic necessity. The failure of states to fulfill economic, social, and political human rights plays a key role in pushing women to migrate (WMN, 2017. p. 3). Females are progressively moving to Japan, often to upgrade their financial condition by looking for employment or education or other reasons.

### **Economic Factors**

Poverty, limited employment opportunities, and deteriorating agricultural productivity are some of the motives behind migration to Japan. Economic factors as shown from the above data constituted the main factor of the female migrant to work in Japan. The high poverty rate, low employment opportunities, low wages, high living expenses, and large family burden play a vital role. An informant in in-depth interviews stated that the main income source was agriculture, which was insufficient for their family's livelihood purpose in education, daily necessities goods, health, and other needs. More, importantly their contribution and hard work were not well recognized and valued in terms of their work time (work for whole days) and, contribution towards the family. Household work did not get recognition as other professions by families and society. Those females who were working in private jobs, running small businesses, and working in factories always faced difficulties and discrimination in their workplace. Mostly, they were neglected for recognition such as for equal wages, equal opportunities, promotion, and empowering themselves.

Another important economic factor is the will of Women to improve their educational performance and their children's educational performance by enhancing the facilities (better educational institutions, quality teachers, etc.) and family's financial security. Females as a student have to face lots of socio-economic barriers and problems to continue and complete their studies. They do not have more opportunities for a part-time job or another individual income source to complete their education. Financial independence has often resulted in a means for bargaining for their right to basic assets in which management of the household. From an economic perspective such as large families, low wages, high unemployment, child marriage, health problems, and gender inequality are among the key determinants of female migration. There are a few other reasons with different circumstances that force them to migrate described in social factors.

Before, migration, most women depended completely on their parents, brothers, or husbands even for very minor purchases and decisions. But in Japan, they have a different life than they do in Nepal. They are earning money by themselves and can take care of their selves as well as their families. They were able to educate them in different aspects of their life i.e., lifestyle, education, knowledge, empowerment, and many more

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after living in Japan. They know the value of money, time, and hard work.

### **Social Factors**

There are many villages in Nepal where migration has been established as a culture of the communities; that is, going abroad for money and returning with some money and the experience of living in a different geographical location, preferably in towns and cities. Nepal remains a strongly patriarchal society, with women suffering from low status. There is a strong power relation present, which influences the way that men interact with women. That impacts women's mental health and physical health. Low socioeconomic status means that women are vulnerable to domestic abuse and control by their husbands. They depend on husbands or male family members to provide basic needs and other support. The lack of access to employment and education for women can make them feel dependent on their husbands and family.

Nepalese women undertake migration to break a vicious circle of poverty, patriarchy, illiteracy, and dispossession. Nepalese migrant women are caught in a complex struggle for capabilities as well as a process of emancipation, leading them to break social norms, taboos, and gender stereotypes. Many were forced into early marriages and harnessed migration to escape this reality and renegotiate their role in their families and communities. Some underage women migrants also migrated to escape early marriage. Another reason for migration is an early marriage which causes lots of health complications.

The present study shows that migrant women's transnational subjectivities are also in a complex process of emancipation, whereby the exposure (for the first time – alone) to a challenging and new reality has helped them overcome entrenched fears and taboos, such as freedom of mobility and segregation during menstruation. They have to struggle for their existence in society from different aspects of life. Even, with their significant contributions to the family, living in Nepal and Japan, they are yet to give any obvious space to family and less priority to include in such exercises. When practices and traditions of society and family discriminate against women by limiting their access to opportunities in education, employment, politics, and decision-making ability then their capacity to participate and contribute to society is discouraged. Few women are encouraged by the progress and success of other women who are living or returning from

Japan.

Various social factors push women into migration as a result women become more empowered and stronger. The level of high income, knowledge, lifestyle, self-esteem, and their way of looking towards the family and society makes a positive impact on their lives and their status.

### **Pull Factors of Migration**

This study formulated the various pull factors for Nepalese women to migrate to Japan. Firstly, there are lots of work opportunities for both males and females without any discrimination. Even they provide opportunities for all those women with low-skill or with no skills. Gender equality is another reason for female migration. 10 times more income can be achieved with the same workload they do in Nepal. Equal wages and salaries are offered in Japan with better working conditions and facilities. Higher living standards with freedom of expression for women make a more attractive destination for migration. Women empowerment and good health benefits are other reasons for coming Nepalese to Japan. High quality of education and more educational opportunities for females and their children with good public service also attract more females to Japan. Safety is another major reason for migration. Lastly, the culture and humanity they show through their friendly nature and behaviour are assets of female migration.

### **Opinion of Focus Group Discussion**

The participatory approach was used to gather in-depth information from the 20 informants. It was used to convey a deep study on women's migration. Socio-economic impact on them, their opinion towards migration, and problems and challenges faced them. The majority of the informants convey a similar opinion of economic and social reasons for their migration to Japan. Most of the married women among them were forced to migrate by their families for social reasons and for the economic benefits of the family. For those who were working in Nepal was insufficient, and for that reason, they came here to earn more money for themselves and their family.

Few of the informants give priority to education which they were unable to gain in Nepal for various reasons i.e., gender inequality, early marriage, poverty, huge family, socio-cultural barriers, and many more. They opined that could find a good job and make

a better career here in Japan after the completion of their studies. Even those who have refugee visas want to work for more time and want to stay as long as possible for their economic growth and bright future. And, those informants with good educational levels want work as their qualification and skill. They want a good education, equality, empowerment, good health, more opportunities, safety and freedom, decision-making freedom, importance to their household work, and need to bring changes in harmful socio-cultural values and norms in Nepal. Most of the informants opined that the Nepal government needs to make some policies and plans and their implementation in all sectors for the growth of females. Strong policies and rule with appropriate guidance for those women who wants to come to Japan by providing good skill training, minimal basic level language classes, and educating about the culture and other aspects of the country. For the growth of Nepalese women in Japan, both countries need to formulate effective policies and plans and executive them based on providing opportunities with incredibility.

### **Conclusion**

This study focused to explore and analyze the role of economic and social factors from both push and pull perspectives of Nepalese women's migration to Japan. This step toward migration occurs within broad social and economic contexts. The strong reasons for migration are impoverishment and will for better income. The economic situation of the family, the role of society, and their circumstances deter the migration of women. This study argues that having social and economic difficulties for women forced to migrate and good income with lots of good opportunities in Japan attract them to migrate here (most of the time, not always willingly). Finally, for the proper management of female migration to other countries, the country needs to formulate effective policies that can make the best use of the positive effects of migration and needs to provide a clear orientation to them.

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