

Characteristics of Circumstances and Influential Forces of Migration in Nepal (1990-2016): An Integrative Literature Review

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Abstract: The aftermath of conflicts and better livelihood as well as financial opportunities are the main push-pull factors of migration in Nepal. The authors surveyed several articles published between 1990 and 2016, which feature the various dimensions of both internal and international migration in Nepal such as; the context of migration, challenges of acculturation, and also forms of migration other than labor migration. This integrative literature review was undertaken in order to explore the inherent characteristics of both internal as well as international migration in Nepal. We found that a lack of employment opportunity in their home country caused a significant rise in the international migration from Nepal, mainly to Gulf countries. Besides that, the review also explores the factors of better livelihood opportunities in urban areas and the impact of conflicts as potential reasons of internal migration in Nepal. This research disseminates awareness of the inherent factors of both internal and international migration patterns in Nepal which will be supportive to the concerned government authorities in systematizing new migration policies.

Keywords: Internal war, migration, nepal

Introduction

This integrative review presents the key findings from the literature published between 1990 and 2016, which analyze the different facets of internal and international migration in Nepal. It contains five different sections. The first section examines the historical circumstances of both internal as well as international migration in Nepal, whereas the second section reviews elements which have been the dominant reasons behind studies carried out about the general impact of emigration from Nepal to Gulf countries. Section three revolves round the issue of how the Nepali people returning from foreign employments choose to settle in urban areas instead of going back to their birthplace. The fourth section analyzes the

challenges that Nepali immigrants face in the course of assimilation to advanced lifestyles in foreign countries. The final section explores various factors that contribute to the promotion of a migration culture in Nepal. It provides insight into how the social hierarchy, as well as gender, play roles in determining the possibility of labour migration to different destinations. In addition to this, the final section also introduces other forms of migration which are quite popular in Nepal, such as migrating for educational purposes and migrating for permanent resident opportunities.

Historical Context of Migration in Nepal

The growing influence of the concept of globalization and networks have diminished

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distances across physical space, which has resulted in making goods, people, ideas and services more mobile in the present time. The prodigious rise in the connectivity and movement of these individuals across different parts of the globe necessitates new ways to look at migration rather than the conventional interpretation of remittance focused movement. Most of the migration theories based on the push-pull framework, which interprets migration to be a result of potential migrants comparing appealing factors of possible destinations (pull factors) with undesirable elements of their current residence (push factors) (De Haas, 2021). The probability of migration increases as either push or pull factors become stronger (Shrestha, 2017).

The ten-year armed conflict in Nepal, which occurred between 1996 and 2006 escalated both internal and international migration. International migration from Nepal is an historical phenomenon with Nepalis having migrated primarily to countries of the Indian subcontinent and Tibet for centuries (Gellner and Hausner, 2018; Debnath and Nag, 2014; Gartaula and Niehof, 2013; Thieme, 2006). Although there is no concrete study tracing the history of labour migration from Nepal as of yet, international labour migration from Nepal has increased quite remarkably in recent decades, primarily due to the oil boom in the Gulf countries and economic growth in countries of East and South Asia. In the early stages, government agencies were involved in the recruitment of foreign labour to the Gulf countries. However, due to the increase in the number of foreign workers, the involvement of the private sector in managing the foreign employment sector has increased. As Sijapati and Bhattarai (2015) point out, recruitment agencies are the main point of contact for the migrant workers in the country of origin, at least on paper. They play the role of mediator

between the migrant worker and placement agencies in the country of origin. Since the private recruiters focus primarily on profit during the selection process, they do not pay significant attention to skills and quality of workers. Recruitment decisions, in the case of the majority of unskilled and low-skilled workers from Nepal, are fundamentally based on the disposition of the workers to work for the low wages on offer. Recruitment and final selection of the workers in most Gulf countries is based on verbal communication of employers and recruitment agencies with local recruitment agents in the dispatching countries.

Besides cross border movements, the data from the Nepal 2011 census that reflects migration from rural to urban areas and from the hills to the plains, suggests that people have become increasingly mobile in Nepal. According to the Census (2011), there was a significant increase in the population of the Terai region migrating overseas, while it declined substantially in the hills and mountain regions (Gartaula and Niehof, 2013; CBS, 2012). Bhandari and Grant (2007) found that agricultural production alone is not a viable livelihood option for rural communities in Nepal. Thus, diversification of livelihood strategies is a common strategy among the rural population. A study from Massey et al. (2010) in the context of Central Nepal (the Chitwan Valley) suggests that there are weaker linkages between environmental changes and demographic pressure with long-distance migration. According to a study by Johnson (2000, as cited in Piotrowski, 2013), poor farmers from rural areas, who come in contact with the people living sophisticated life, may begin to develop a sense of relative scarcity and a desire for modern facilities.

Push and Pull Factors of Migration

The displacement of people during

the Maoist conflict followed a relatively organized trend. The conflict started in rural areas and intensified there. Thus, people who had been internally displaced from rural villages in Nepal came to live in the district headquarters, area headquarters, small cities and towns, larger urban centers and the capital, Kathmandu. According to Ghimire (2010) Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) destinations coincide with the general rural-urban migration routes and most of them chose places where they already knew someone within their social network, or had previously known to them through business connections, health services, education or work. Since the migrating people have a limited means of livelihood in their rural area and they do not have to bear financial loss by leaving their native village; and, they have very little incentive to return home again. What attracts them to urban areas are the cash income opportunities and brighter prospects for their children. However, a number of elderly migrant people wish to return, as they feel that urban areas are too much of a contrast to their place of origin. However, they were indeed aware of the opportunities that urban areas hold for their younger family members. On the other hand, young people are reluctant to return to their village of birth; just like the youths in the other two categories, they feel the “pull” of the urban community. Hence these groups are less willing to go back permanently to the “villages” (Ghimire, 2010: 104).

As Ghimire (2010) examines in her study of livelihood of IDPs in urban areas, although their lives are fraught with difficulties, these difficulties are largely outweighed by the perceived opportunities offered by the urban environment. During their initial days of migration to urban areas, IDPs mostly depend on their extended families, kin, relatives, friends or fellow

neighbors to provide for them as guests until they can fend for themselves; and the very opportunities and networks developed in the course of living largely influences their decision to return home.

The immigrant's return is highly influenced by the prospects of improving their living standard in the host area and in their place of origin. Although they were initially forced to move to urban areas, all of them have in some way benefitted from the valuable opportunities available. Nevertheless, the prevailing plight of individuals upon being displaced differs. Consequently, instead of opting for a definitive return, IDPs prefer to share their lives between rural areas and urban areas: making their lives multi-local (Ghimire, 2010).

Theories concerning rural out-migration find that different factors are responsible in influencing an individual's desire to migrate. Economic theories focus on market forces, and include neoclassical, human capital, and new economics of migration models (Piotrowski, 2013). The neoclassical model highlights wage differentials between regions as a primary determinant of migration. It views the migration as the result of cost-benefit analysis made by individuals deciding where to move in order to maximize their expected lifetime earnings (Todaro, 1969). Over time, as the number of social ties between sending and receiving areas grows, more people migrate, and migration emerges as a mass phenomenon (Piotrowski, 2013). Networks are maintained by an ongoing process of return migration, where migrants regularly go home for varying periods each year and settled migrants return to their communities of origin (Massey et al., 1987).

Impact of Foreign Employment on Internal Migration

In the context of a developing economy

like Nepal, employment opportunity in foreign countries has also become one of the main reasons of internal migration from rural to urban areas. This trend has been common, especially among those who could earn, from foreign employment, enough for buying land and a home in urban areas. Indra, the protagonist, in Muna Gurung's "Lion City" (Gurung, 2015), belongs to a remote village in the far western region of Nepal. He had a very unfortunate married life because his first wife ran away with another man. However, after meeting a Scottish man in Jawalakhel, who offered him the opportunity of joining the Singapore Police Force, his life completely transformed because he was no longer 'Indra with his runaway wife', but 'Indra who was going to be the first man from his village to fly to Singapore on an aeroplane' (Gurung, 2015: n.p.).

Most of the people from rural areas of Nepal, who go to foreign countries for an employment opportunity, have a dream of having their future homes in cities where they can reside with their families after they retire. As Gurung (2015) writes about Indra's plan of future settlement, since he was "retiring and going back to Nepal but he was not just going back to his village, he was going to settle in the capital city instead, the big city where only the wealthy could build homes" (Gurung 2015: 242). Back to his home country after retirement, Indra had a plan to settle in Kathmandu instead of going back to the village of his birth. He had bought a large piece of land in Lazimpat and had saved enough money to build a house and imported brick and cement (Gurung 2015: 242). Financial prosperity ignites the feeling for upward mobility among many migrant workers; and so, Indra's dream of a modern home with a big dog, big walls, and even a car, which features in the lifestyles typical of the privileged class in urban areas and represents a common dream

of those poor people from remote areas who would consider foreign employment as an opportunity for migration to urban locations. The vast difference of living standards between Indra's rural origin and the advanced capital city was the primary reason behind his preference to consider foreign employment.

Acculturation of Nepali Diaspora

The issue of acculturation and socialization has been most common and widely discussed among many Nepali diaspora individuals, such as those who were moving to a developed country like the United Kingdom. Van Ommen (2014) when entering Camden Town in Britain, experienced flavors and lifestyles much the same as that of Thamel, a tourist area in Kathmandu as "the familiarity of exotica curios sold to tourists in Nepal, the presence of visitors sporting dreadlocks and colorful cotton garments, the number of local venues dedicated to live rock events and the not-so-hidden drug deals, all in such a small area, gave a sense to many Nepalis, besides myself, that Camden was just like Thamel" (Van Ommen, 2014: 133). The town reminded her of her previous experience of being in Thamel with live music bars and shops selling merchandise such as woolen rainbow hats, dresses with Om, yin-yang and dragon motifs, tie-dye trousers, Golden Nagchampa incense sticks, singing bowls, chillums and other hippie bric-a-brac. She found many Nepali market vendors and ex-gangsters who had expanded their businesses from Thamel over to London (Van Ommen, 2014).

Despite the tough restrictions imposed on Nepalis entering the UK on student visas, the changes introduced into British legislation that granted settlement rights for serving and retired Gurkha soldiers and their families has accelerated migration since 2004; as a result, the Nepali diaspora has grown significantly. However, the

social landscape has changed from young professionals and students to include old pensioners and children. While many of the Gurkha families were from historically disadvantaged ethnic groups and indigenous minorities, they became a majority amongst the Nepalis living in Britain.

Children of Gurkhas, according to Van Ommen (2014), had led privileged lives in countries such as Nepal, Brunei, Hong Kong and other areas of Gurkha army encampments; and were educated in good schools due to their fathers' incomes. Having grown up with their self-chosen lifestyle in the absence of their fathers for several years, it turned out to be quite a challenging adjustment for those youths to develop new sets of relationships, and also to settle down as nuclear families in the UK's quiet country villages and towns. Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of them had studied English and were more or less familiar with western culture, their lack of confidence regarding language, alongside other issues of adjusting to the new surroundings and 'fitting in', drew many to socialize with each other rather than with non-Nepali peers.

However, after living in the UK for some years, the younger generations feel that they are more at home than their parents. Due to the generational shift, young children acculturate themselves to British popular culture more easily than their parents. According to Gellner (2014), "the older generation of Nepalis often spend a lot of time worrying about their children: they may speak Nepali, but will they acquire the habit of reading it? Will they take advantage of the educational opportunities in the UK? Will they ignore their parents' wishes, live separately, join gangs or have dissolute lives, rather than working hard like their parents? Will they retain a connection to Nepal?" (Gellner, 2014: 50).

Younger generations, unlike their parents, are not too concerned about

campaigns for equal pensions for Gurkhas or for dual citizenship, which is quite shocking for many of their parents' generation (Gellner, 2014). While there has been an overwhelming influence on them through British popular culture, based on their musical tastes, which include many top Nepali bands, they, nevertheless continue to think of themselves as Nepalis (Gellner, 2014). Nepathya (an English based Nepali folk rock band), for example, was one of the first Nepali folk rock bands to fill the Wembley Arena to capacity in 2013. Their success was just the tip of a lively Nepali youth cultural scene that blends together Nepali and global influences (Gellner, 2014).

The prevailing friction with the local British population posed challenges to the integration of Nepali migrants into local communities. As indicted in an open letter sent by local MP Gerald Howarth to the British Prime Minister on 25 January 2011 (cited in Gellner, 2014: 44) "This issue is of deep concern to the local authority and its Leader as their services are in danger of being overwhelmed by this influx, as are those provided by the National Health Service, Citizens Advice Bureaux and local schools. Some GP practices are struggling to cope. It is also causing immense tensions within the community which are exacerbated by the difficulties encountered by the Nepalese in integrating into the settled community, particularly given the low levels of literacy and often limited understanding of English".

Factors influential on the Culture and Nature of Migration

The mass media, similar to social remittances, are another source of exposure to ideas and lifestyles that spread via diffusion, including ideational change in self-image. In poor countries, newspapers, radio programs, movies, and television shows, are typically produced in local cities or are imported from abroad

(Barber and Axinn, 2004). They represent a significant source of urban or western ideas, practices, and lifestyles that contrast sharply with rural traditional culture (Piotrowski, 2013). Since migration has its impact on the circumstances of both the receiving and sending locations, the causes and consequences of migration should be studied as part of the same system and processes. Migration remolds the socio-economic development context at both the origin and destination locations which subsequently influences migration patterns. For example, remittances sent back to family could alter the social and economic background in the areas of origin and encourage further migration (Van Dalen et al., 2005). Levit (1998) emphasized the role of “social remittances”, which she construes as a local level, migration-driven forms of cultural diffusion. This flow back consisting of ideas, behaviours, and identities not only plays a role in potentially promoting immigrant entrepreneurship, family formation, and political integration, but also affects the perceptions, feelings of relative deprivation and aspirations of people, which are subsequently also likely to affect subsequent migration patterns. The influx of international remittances to migrant households can increase intra-community inequality and feelings of relative deprivation among non-migrants and becomes one of the encouraging factors to promote a ‘culture of migration’. However, Taylor (1999) cautioned that we may underestimate the potential benefits of migration such as indirect effects on incomes in migrant sending households and easing capital and risk constraints on local production which may not be captured in typical remittance-use surveys. As Massey (1990: 4-5) has pointed out, migration induces changes in social and economic structures that make additional migration more likely.

Some experts believe that labour migratory trends display a hierarchy of class, education level and wealth status. Workers with poor economic backgrounds and low education choose to go to India; whereas Malaysia and other Gulf countries are found to be the preferred destinations for both better-off and better educated migrant workers. Those with higher status and wealth than Gulf migrants are more likely to work in “other developed countries”. Respondents from an interview by Ghimire and Upreti, (2012:8) echoed this idea: “For instance, people from Nepal society belonging to “A” class economically prefer going to America, Japan, or England, category “B” types go to Canada and Europe. “C” types go to Korea, Taiwan and similar countries, “D” types go to Gulf and Malaysia. “E” class go to India which is based on network and the poorest section “F” type work for the landlords as tillers, ploughers and foreman. The majority of the categories belonging to D, are labour migrants whereas categories A and B also includes students” (Interview with Ms. K. Rai (name changed), Kathmandu, 02 July 2011). This hierarchy, generated due to the intersection of economic and social class with migration, hints at the social and economic influence of the migrants and the households they represent.

The conventional image of women in Nepali society has many cultural as well legal hurdles against the movements of females which has prevented them from opting for employment focused migration until recently. On the one hand, such migration has increased their mobility as a whole as it has provided more spaces for women to participate in economic and socio-political aspects of Nepali society. On the other hand, academics and stakeholders have divided opinions about whether or not to promote female migration considering the multiple physical and mental abuses these women

face while working abroad and after they return (Ghimire and Upreti, 2012).

In addition to labor migrants, a large majority of Nepalis migrate for educational purposes. According to Ghimire and Upreti (2012), a total of 62,391 Nepali students received the “no objection letter” from the Ministry of Education in Nepal to migrate as students in January 2011, and Nepali students study in 70 destinations around the world, including most commonly in the United States, Australia, Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, and other European countries.

The Diversity Visa (DV) programs sponsored by the USA, and the Permanent Resident Card (PR Card) sponsored by Canada and Australia are other important components contributing to the trend of migration from Nepal. While many people are also trafficked to India and abroad, there is no sufficient data available to decipher exact figures in such cases (Ghimire and Upreti, 2012).

Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to explore the component forces of both the internal and international migrations in Nepal. The articles published from 1990 onwards were reviewed using an integrative approach and the review highlighted that employment opportunities particularly, in Gulf countries and countries in South and East Asia, have increased international migration from Nepal. Internal migration in the context of Nepal, as examined in this review, has occurred as a result of different factors such as better livelihood opportunities in the urban regions, impact of a ten-year long Maoist conflict, and financial gain due to the employment opportunities in foreign countries. Furthermore, this integrative review analyzes the issue of acculturation that many Nepali immigrants have been facing while living in developed countries

such as the United Kingdom.

Overall, as the survey is inclusive of predominant factors of internal as well as international migration, the respective authorities in the government can avail themselves of the evidence concerning historical circumstances of migration in Nepal, which can have significant contribution in policy-making process.

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