Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Cross-Border Labour Migration between Nepal and India

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Abstract

The enduring relationship between Nepal and India is the focus of this study, which delves into the social and cultural dynamics adopted by Nepali and Indian labour migrants in their respective destinations. The study extends to the examination of labour migrants' social backgrounds, encompassing aspects such as religion, caste, ethnicity, education, and family structure. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study incorporates case studies supported by field observations in the destination countries. The gathered data undergoes analysis through descriptive statistics, allowing for a comparative assessment between the two migrant groups. While the socio-cultural status of both groups exhibits slight differences, disparities in caste and ethnicity indicators are noted between Nepal and India. Notably, a significant proportion of Nepali labour migrants hail from Dalit communities when compared to other caste and ethnic groups. In contrast, Indian labour migrants, predominantly from the Other Backward Class (OBC), exhibit a different trend. The volume of Nepali labour migrants heading to India surpasses that of Indian labour migrants to Nepal. The shorter migration distance for Indian labour migrants enables frequent visits to their place of origin, facilitating the celebration of local traditions and culture. In contrast, Nepali labour migrants encounter fewer opportunities to return to their destination regularly. A noteworthy observation is the comparatively higher educational status of Nepali labour migrants as opposed to their Indian counterparts heading to Nepal. The nuanced differences between the two migrant groups correlate with their religious affiliations and socio-economic backgrounds. Interestingly, both groups exhibit a limited number of enrolled children in destination schools, indicating a shared challenge in accessing education opportunities.

Keywords: Cross-border, labour migration, socio-cultural dynamics, Nepal and India

Introduction

Migration, a fundamental aspect of human history, encompasses the movement of individuals or groups from one location to another. This phenomenon, dating back to the earliest stages of human evolution, was primarily driven by the pursuit of sustenance and shelter. Over time, as people sought to optimize their living conditions, migration became a means of establishing residence at their preferred locations. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2020) offers a precise definition of migration as the act of people or groups relocating either across international borders or within a single nation. This relocation can vary in duration, ranging from temporary and seasonal to permanent, and stems from diverse motives such as economic opportunities, environmental factors, familial ties, or political circumstances. Emigrants are individuals departing from their home country, while immigrants are those arriving in a foreign nation.

Migration patterns to and through India remain largely undocumented. The Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) offers statistics exclusively for Nepali workers who depart with labour permits issued by the Nepalese government. To legally migrate to countries other than India, Nepalese workers must secure work permits from their home government. However, this statistic does not encompass migration to India, as Nepali citizens can enter India without the need for formal authorization. The volume of India migration is not known. It is expected that about 2-3 million Nepali migrants are working in India.

India stands as the primary destination for labour migrants hailing from the Karnali and Sudurpaschim Pradesh regions. This tradition of labor migration from Nepal to India has been passed down through generations (Bhatt, 2023). In Sudurpaschim Province, migration often follows a pattern where people become permanent residents in the Tarai region and engage in seasonal migration to India. While the majority of Sudurpaschim province residents have chosen India, those with more significant resources venture to Malaysia and Gulf countries in pursuit of employment opportunities. The allure of lower-skilled job accessibility and more economical migration costs, compared to the Gulf and other nations, serves as the main driver for migration to India (Bhatt, 2015).

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2015), a significant portion of Nepalese male migrants fall within the working-age group and possess limited education and skills. While Nepal's industrialization has gradually increased following political transitions, Indian citizens, particularly from states like Uttar Pradesh, have increasingly come to Nepal as laborers. Previously, there was a shortage of skilled labor for machinery-related work in Nepal, leading to the influx

of Indian human resources to support development activities. This phenomenon is now common in all of Nepal's cities. Gill (2003) revealed that a substantial number of households in Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces have at least one member working in India, while Indians from Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar often come to the eastern Terai region of Nepal to engage in seasonal agricultural labor. Thronton (2016) provided insights into the migration process and motivations of Indian labor migrants to Nepal, highlighting that many originate from less-developed Indian states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, driven by factors such as higher wage rates, no requirement for work permits, and proximity to Nepal.

Additionally, Bhatt (2016) noted that a lack of awareness among Nepali labor migrants often leads them to select destinations based on traditional connections, such as friends, relatives, and local contractors. Financial constraints also influence their decisions, with individuals opting for the most cost-effective transportation options and following the preferences of their social network, or "team," at transit points.

In terms of gender dynamics, the majority of male labour migrants tend to head to India from Nepal, while women are left behind due to prevailing social norms (Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2008). However, Thieme and Muller (2010) shed light on the gender inequality aspects of migration to India, where women often accompany their husbands for medical reasons and, with time, adapt to the local socioeconomic conditions. Despite the significant volume of labor migration between Nepal and India, research in this field remains relatively limited compared to studies on migration to third countries. While individual studies have explored labor migration from Nepal to India, there is a notable absence of comparative research between the two countries in this domain. The bi-directional nature of migration, where Nepali migrants seek work in India and Indians do the same in Nepal despite opportunities still existing in their respective home regions, underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis of labor migration between Nepal and India (Bhatt, 2023). To add to the literature of migration, the primary objective of this study is to analyze the socio-cultural dynamics of cross-border labour migration between two countries.

In the broader context, this research contributes to understanding the complex relationship between Nepal and India concerning migration and its profound impact on the socio-cultural factors. By providing informed policy recommendations based on our findings, this study endeavours to foster a positive and cooperative relationship between these neighbouring nations while advocating for safer, well-managed, and reputable migration practices. Ultimately, this research aims to bridge existing knowledge gaps and enhance comprehension of cross-border labor migration dynamics between Nepal and India, facilitating more informed decision-making in this critical domain.

Methods and Procedures

It is believed that reality is objective and common to all the migrant labourers of both countries. The reality is the product of the common concept of migrant labour. Ontologically, the researcher believes that the realities exist in the form of common and objective mental construction of the migrants. Researchers believe that there are some common causes of labor migration even though both countries have plenty of job opportunities. In addition, people migrate from one to another county in search of a job. The ontological premise of this study is to explore the nature of the existing reality related to understanding the cross-border labor migration between Nepal and India. The epistemological understanding was considered to be the primary source of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2011) about the evaluation of socio-cultural dynamics of labour migrants and their' impact on society.

This study is built on the belief that the post-positivism approach. This study aims to explain the socio-cultural dynamics of cross-border labour migration between two countries. The mixed method has been undertaken to explain the situation of cross-border labour migration and its impact on society. Primary as well as secondary data have been used to understand the current position of migration. For quantitative data, a survey has been carried out while for collecting some qualitative data for the study, field observation and interviews with selected labour migrants in both destinations have been carried out. Furthermore, some case studies have been collected to understand the situation better.

This study covers the Susrpaschim Province, where the flow of labour migrants is high. Most of the Nepali labour migrants from Sudurpaschim Province choose their destination in India, whereas the Indian labour migrants from different locations choose Sudurpaschim Province as their working destination. Indian labourers mostly choose to work at Mahendranagar (the adjacent border to Nepal). Empirically, the study was conducted in Mahendranagar (Bhimdatt Municipality) of Sudurpacchim province, taking the study universe of Indian labour migrants who work at Mahendranagar and Nepalese labour migrants to India from Bhimdatt municipality for at least six months. Some of the case studies and observations have been conducted at the Gaddachouki border, which is enter and exit point for the entire Sudrpaschim Province.

According to data from Bhimdatt Municipality profile (2020), 4865 people from different wards migrated to India for work. Likewise, there is a survey that identified the Indian labour migrants in Bhimdatt municipality (Mahendranagar). As the nature of their jobs relates to the town area, it is observed that about 924 Indian labourers were working in Mahendranagar (Nepal). The sample size for

Nepali labour migrants to India is determined 370 and for Indian labour migrants is determined 280 by using the Yemane formula for sampling. The lottery method is used for selecting the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Migration is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors, including population growth, limited land resources, family separation, economic challenges, environmental conditions, and political circumstances (Basyal, 2014). Additionally, there is a diversity of migrant types, each hailing from distinct socio-economic backgrounds (Adhikari & Gurung, 2009; Bhatt, 2015).

Volume of Labour Migrants at the Destination

The population of migrant labourers in both of the destinations was not precisely known. In the case of Nepali migrants to India, Bhimdatt Municipality collected data on labour migrants for the Municipality profile in 2020. According to the report, 4,865 people from different wards migrated to India for work. Likewise, there is a survey that identified the Indian labour migrants in Bhimdatt municipality (Mahendranagar). As their nature of jobs relate to the town area, it is observed that about 924 Indian labourers were working in Mahendranagar (Nepal). The survey was focused on four sectors (construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and service) to collect the volume of labor migrants who are staying at least six months in the Bhimdatt Municipality.

Table 1

Distribution of Population of Nepali Labour Migrants to India

Wards	Total Households (HHs)	Population (Migrants)	Percentage
1	644	215	33.4
2	1155	388	33.6
3	1137	243	21.4
4	1278	76	6.0
5	679	325	47.9
6	1936	407	21.1
7	969	216	22.3
8	897	312	34.8
9	1259	305	24.3
10	1777	547	30.8
11	730	175	24.0
12	537	229	42.7
13	862	334	38.8
14	564	275	48.8
15	790	106	13.5

16	581	149	25.7
17	326	66	20.3
18	3805	295	7.8
19	758	215	28.4
Total	20684	4865	23.6

Source: Bhimdatt Municipality (2020) and CBS (2021).

Likewise, in the case of Indian labor migrants to Nepal, a survey found that there were mainly four sectors (construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors) based on the nature of jobs engaged in Bhimdatt Municipality. There were 924 Indian labour migrants found working in different sectors in the study area (Bhimdatt Municipality).

Table 2

Distribution of Indian Labour Migrants in Bhimdatt Municipality

Job Sectors (Strata)	Total Number of Labourers
Construction Sector (*Meson: house construction, road construction, floor & tile setter/marbles)*	187
Manufacture sector (*carpenter, bricklayers*)	381
Service Sector (Hairdresser*, Painter, Automobiles, Welders (Grill/steel))*	300
Agriculture sector	56
Total	**924**

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

The above data shows the volume of Indian labour migrants in the municipality and it is expected that a similar number of labour migrants are still working in the different destinations. In general review, we can describe that the volume of Nepali labour migrants to India is more significant than Indian labour migrants to Nepal. It is expected that more than 20 million Nepali migrants are working in the different states of India.

Population of Nepali Migrants to Indian Cities

According to data provided by Bhimdatt municipality, 4865 people migrated to India. Among the total population, 16 percent of females migrated to India. Almost all females migrated with their male partners. Along with them, 67 percent of the

total migrant population is married, 32 percent is unmarried, and only one percent is single or widowed.

Table 3

Distribution of Migrants to India by Selected Characteristics

Characteristics	Migrants' Population	
Sex	*(N)*	*(%)*
Male	4,073	83.7
Female	792	16.3
Marital Status		
Married	3,260	67.0
Unmarried	1,573	32.3
Single/Widow	32	0.7
Caste/Ethnic Group		
Hill Brahmin	812	16.7
Chhetri	1,628	33.5
Thakuri	319	6.4
Dalit	1,807	37.1
Sanyasi	92	1.9
Janjati/Tharu	199	4.1
Others	8	0.2
Total	**4,865**	**100.0**

Source: Bhimdatt Municipality (2020).

Among the total migrated population to India, the number of Dalit migrants is found to be the highest (37.1%). However, the size of the Dalit population is the lowest (7.7%) in the Kanchanpur district. Likewise, 33.5 percent and 16.7 percent of migrants to India are of Chhetri and Brahmin descent, respectively.

The Population of Indian Migrants to Mahendranagar (Bhimdatt Municipality)

In the case of Indian migrants to Nepal, the survey was carried out based on the nature of jobs because the administrative data of Indian migrants was not found.

The researcher decided to find information about the migrants from their households.

These households were surveyed by giving priority to the selective (major jobs) having a larger size of the population working in the Mahendranagar. The research was carried out focusing on the four significant sectors: service, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. It was calculated that 924 households were found working in four selected sectors. However, the size of Indian migrants is more significant, and those working in other sectors like business, entrepreneurship, self-employed, and other small businesses are excluded from the research. The migrants working in the brick industries come along with their family members as workers, but in this research, the family was taken as a single household. Due to time limitations and the need for research, the total population of Indian migrants has not been determined.

Table 4

Distribution of Indian Labour Migrants Enumerated in the Study Area (Bhimdatt Municipality) According to Nature of Job

| Nature of Jobs	Migrants' Population	
	(N)	*(%)*
Hairdresser	122	13.2
Welders	78	8.4
Mason/ Road construction	32	3.5
Mason/Building Construction	120	13.0
Mason (Tayal/Marvel/Stone layers)	35	3.8
Bricklayers	226	24.4
Carpenter	155	16.8
Automobile	58	6.3
Painter	42	4.5
Agro farm	56	6.1
Total	**924**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

Most labor migrants from both groups engage in various types of low-skilled jobs at their destinations. However, there is a notable difference in the types

of jobs undertaken by Indian and Nepali labor migrants. Indian labor migrants are commonly found working in four key sectors: agriculture (41%), services (33%), construction (20%), and manufacturing (6%). In contrast, Nepali labor migrants typically work in household roles such as watchmen, cleaners, and caregivers, as well as in hotels, restaurants, construction labor, agriculture, office support roles, and various manufacturing factories in India.

Figure 1

Working Sectors (Nature of Jobs) of Indian Labourers in Nepal
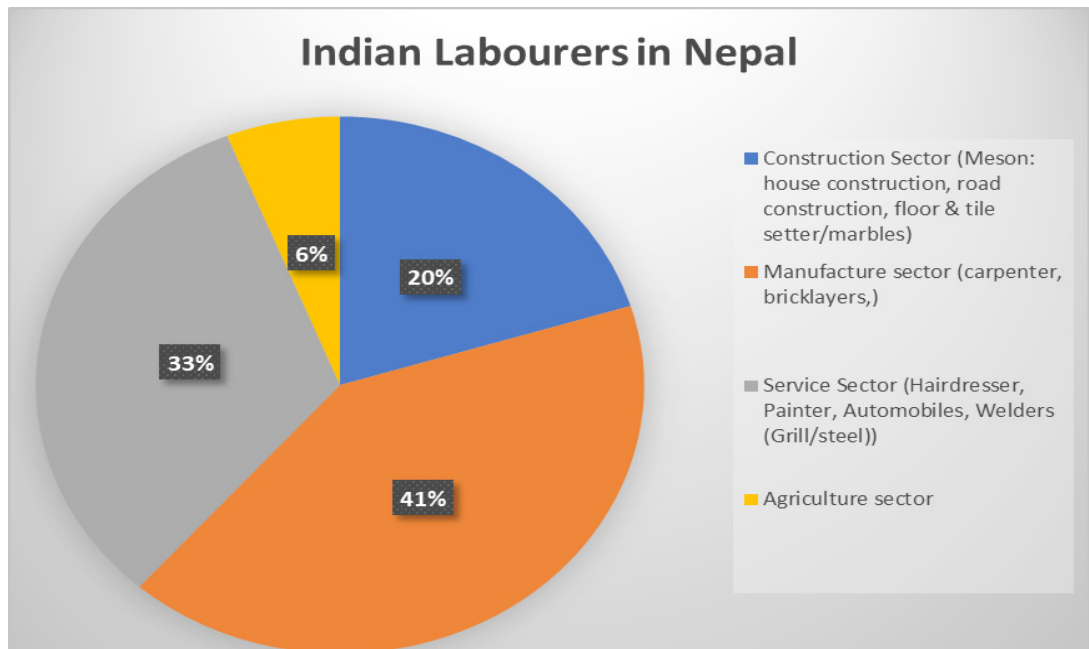
Social and Demographic Characteristics: Migrants' Age Group

Social characteristics show the general social background of the migrants, which describes the status and position of migration. According to CBS (2012), the population of the Bhimdatt Municipality is 104,549 (male: 51,087 and female: 53,512) with 20,684 HHs (Table 3.2). Likewise, the composition of the population under the age of 15 is 32.7 percent, the working-age population (15–59) is 59.4 percent, and the elderly people ((60+) is 7.9 percent (Table 5).

Social characteristics show the general social background of the migrants, which describes the status and position of migration. Table 5 shows that the mean age of Nepali labour migrants is 28.9 years and that of Indian labour migrants to Nepal is 32.9 years; some differences of about four years. The age group 20–29 years has the highest number of migrants (36.6%) among labour migrants of both

countries who crossed their border for work, including 40% of migrants from Nepal and 32.5 percent of migrants from India. The majority (75.1 % of Nepali and 64.6 % of Indian) of adult migrants between the ages of 18 and 40 years are found to migrate, this is due to the higher potentiality of migrants of this age group who bear age-specific physiological proximity as well as the potential of skill and labour for finding and performing the job in destination countries, whereas 7.8 percent of Nepali children and 6.1 percent of Indian children are found to cross their borders for work in destination countries.

Table 5

Distribution of Respondents by Age and Gender

| Age groups of migrants in years	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Up to 19 years	52	14.1	32	11.4
20-29	148	40.0	91	32.5
30-39	91	24.6	69	24.6
40-49	54	14.6	50	17.8
50-65	25	6.7	38	13.6
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0
Mean age (in a year)		29.7		32.8
Less than 15 years	0	0	7	2.5
Children (<18 years)	29	7.8	17	6.1
Adults (18 -40 years)	278	75.1	181	64.6
Others (more than 40 years)	63	17.0	82	29.3
Working age (15-59 years)	370	100	273	97.5
Gender				
Migrants with spouse	113	30.6	103	36.8

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Similarly, 6.7 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 13.6 percent of Indian labour migrants under the age group of 50–65 years crossed their border for work in each other country. It is also calculated that the age group of 60–65 years of Nepali migrants is not found working in India, but the same age group of Indian migrants is found working in Nepal. Because of the closer working destination (distance), the nature of the work, the lower physical burden, and their long experience in the same work, elderly Indian migrants continue to work. However, Brusle (2006) mentioned that many migrants start working in India at an early age and stop after 45 to 50 years or more, which is a different result from the present study. According to Nepal's

population monograph, almost 40 percent of the population was under the age of 20, which indicates Nepal has a predominantly young population.

In general, women tend not to leave their hometowns proactively; instead, they usually migrate with their husbands. Female migration is often motivated less by job opportunities and more by the desire to accompany their spouses. In some instances, medical treatment has also been a reason for migration. The data highlights distinct gender dynamics, with approximately 30.6% of Nepali labor migrants working in India alongside their husbands, while 36.8% of Indian labor migrants are found in Nepal with their wives.

Figure 2

Gender Distribution of Labour Migrants with Their Spouse
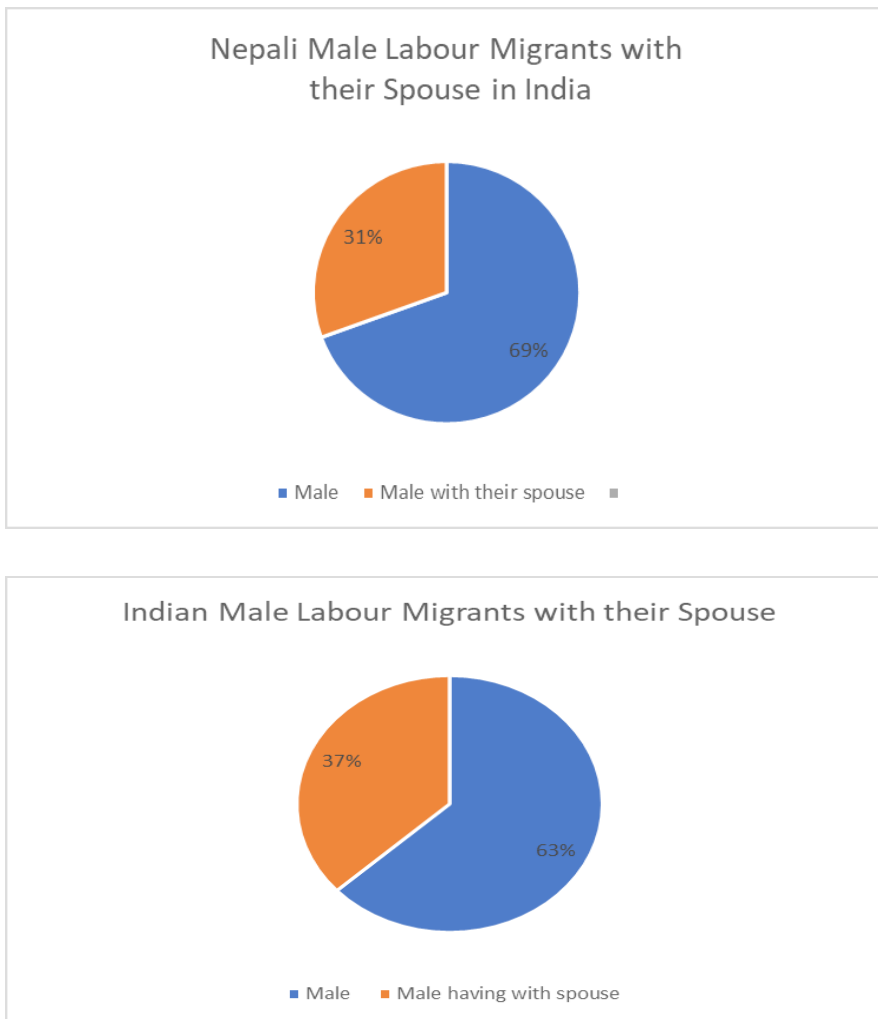
The working-age population (15+ years) had a share of 71.5 percent (20.7 million) of the total population, of which 55.6 percent was female (CBS, 2012). Table 5 shows that 30.6 percent of females in Nepal and 36.8 percent of females in India migrated to their destinations with their husbands. Supporting the above statement, ICIMOD (2010) and Nandini (1999) state that the majority of the males generally migrated to India from Karnali and Sudurpaschim Province, but in the case of women, they were not found to migrate individually due to a lack of education and exposures, as well as the fact that they are involved in their households' responsibilities and agricultural works. Along with this, they feel insecure about migrating alone due to increasing cases of trafficking and other violence in the destination. It is thus seen that migration is gender-sensitive, which genuinely implies even the open and comparatively accessible cross-border migration of women in Nepal and India (Shijapati et al., 2019).

Religion of Migrants

Religious beliefs on divine worship, morals, and ethical issues Caste systems are mostly justified within the higher ranks of the system. Religion is justified within scriptures that are regarded as holy or divine. In the studies of migration in the global context, it is observed that migration does have religious factors, though they are not deterministic in most cases (Bramanti et al., 2020).

Table 6

Distribution of Migrants According to Their Religion

Religion	Country of Origin	
	Nepali labour migrants to India	Indian labour migrants to Nepal
Hindu	370 (100.0%)	102 (36.4%)
Islam	0(0.0%)	171(61.1%)
Sikh	0(0.0%)	7(2.5%)
Total	370 (100.0%)	280(100.0%)

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

According to the population monograph, CBS (2012), about 98.6 percent of the population belongs to Hindus, and 0.2 percent is Muslim in Bhimdatt Municipality. From Table 6, it is clear that the total population of Nepali labour migrants in India belongs to the Hindu religion. However, the majority (61.1%) of Indian labour migrants to Nepal belong to the Islam community, followed by others (36.4% Hindu and 2.5 % Sikh).

Caste/Ethnicity of Labour Migrants

Caste or ethnicity has evolved into a distinct cultural identity for people with migratory implications. The caste system deals with hierarchical issues, which are predominantly justified by the traditional system of social stratification in Nepal. The caste system both in Nepal and India broadly borrows the classical Hindu *Chaturvarna* model, consisting of four broad social classes: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. The CBS of Nepal identified only 60 ethnic/caste groups in the 1991 Census; 100 ethnic/caste groups were further identified in the 2001 Census, and the list of ethnic/caste groups was 125 in the 2011 Census, which also includes 59 indigenous groups (ethnic nationalities). According to CBS (2012), the most populous Jats (ethnic groups) in Nepal are 17.0% Chhetri, 12.0% Brahmin-Hill, 7.0% Magar, 7.0% Tharu, 6.0% Tamang, 5.0% Newar, 5.0% Kami, 4.0% Musalman, 4.0% Yadav, 2.0% Rai, and 31.0% others. In contrast, the caste/ethnicity of India in political-administrative categorization describes the system as 22.8 percent.

Other Backward Class (OBC) is a collective term used by the government of India to classify castes that are educationally or socially disadvantaged. Likewise, "scheduled caste" (SC) is a term for sub-communities within the framework of the Hindu caste system that have historically faced deprivation, oppression, and extreme social isolation in India on account of their perceived "low status" (CBS, 2012).

Table 7

Distribution of Labour Migrants by Caste/Ethnic Group

Caste/Ethnicity	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Brahmin	52	14.0	0	-
Thakuri	32	8.6	0	-
Chhetri	106	28.7	0	-
Dalit	136	36.8	0	-
Sanyasi/Dashnami	21	5.7	0	-
Tharu	23	6.2	0	-
General Caste	0	-	64	22.9
Schedule Caste(SC)	0	-	33	11.8
Schedule Tribes (ST)	0	-	12	4.3
Other Backward Castes (OBC)	0	-	171	61.0
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 7 shows that the majority (36.6%) of the population is from the Dalit community, followed by 28.7 percent of Chhetri, 14 percent of Brahmin, 8.6 percent of Thakuri, 5.7 percent of Sanyasi/Dasnami, and 6.2 percent of the Tharu community that migrated to India from the study area. In contrast, more than half of the population (61%) is from the Other Backward Caste and has come to Bhimdatt Municipality as labour migrants. Likewise, 22.9 percent of the general caste, 11.8 percent of the scheduled caste, and 4.3 percent of scheduled tribes were found to migrate to Nepal (the study area).

According to Bhardwaj (2010), the composition of caste and religious background is almost similar between Nepal and India, where Muslims and Buddhists follow the majority of Hindus. However, in this study, a different trend is seen as there was a mutual dependency for labour, market, social relationships, and services provided in the destination areas. Moreover, it is the reflection of people's religions at their origins that would have strengthened cross-border linkages among the societies in terms of culture. At the same time, Brusle (2006) focused on the circular migration of high-caste men from the Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces. Likewise, McDougal (1968) mentioned that migration depends to some extent on the cultures of the ethnic groups. He reported that the more significant number of migrants were lower caste people such as *Kamis*, *Sarkis*, and *Damais* from Sudurpaschim Provinces due to their poor economic backgrounds. In this study, the Dalit community, which migrated to India from Nepal, accounts for 36.8 percent of the population, accounting for more than one-third of the population in this sample size.

Similarly, 61 percent of other backward caste Indians migrated to Nepal for work. However, this study shows that the majority of the population from marginalized and socially backward communities migrates to neighbouring countries for work. It might be due to their higher rate of poverty, low status of landholdings (even landlessness), lower educational performance, and the proximity of non-skilled labour. Indeed, the caste or ethnic structure in Nepal and India speaks of some socioeconomic characteristics that are closely related to migratory behaviour.

Education Attainment of Labour Migrants between Nepal and India

Education is the crucial indicator for the Human Development Index (HDI). The country that has more HDI is taken as a comparatively rich country. According to the Global HDI report (UNDP, 2020), the HDI of Nepal is 0.602 (142nd rank), and India's is 0.645(131st rank). In education, the average expected years of education in the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is 12.7 years, where Nepal secures 5.0 years of education, and India secures 6.5 years of education. It

shows that Indian people have more experience in education. Most of the migrants, after a certain age, leave their homes and migrate to destinations in search of jobs or better options for livelihood. Hence, they have to drop out of school at that age.

Table 8

Distribution of Labour Migrants by Education Attainment

Level of Education	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal	
	(N)	*%*	*(N)*	*%*
No Education	32	8.6	100	35.7
Some Primary Education	58	15.7	155	55.4
Primary Education Completed	123	33.2	22	7.9
Some Secondary Education	131	35.4	3	1.0
Secondary Education Completed	26	7.1	0	0
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0
Pearson Chi-Square test	*Value*		*Df*	*Sig.*
	290.941		4	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Data revealed that 8.6 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 35.7 percent of Indian labour migrants have no education. Similarly, 15.7 percent of Nepali and 55.4 percent of Indian labour migrants were enrolled in formal education but they did not complete their primary education. Only 33.2 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 7.9 percent of Indian labour migrants have primary-level education. Likewise, 35.4 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 1 percent of Indian labour migrants have some secondary school education. Only 7.1 percent of Nepali labour migrants have completed their secondary level education but there were not found of the respondents from Indian labour migrants have secondary level education.

To determine whether the level of educational attainment and country of migrants are associated, the Chi-square test of independence is used in Table 8. The result indicated that the lower p-value of the Chi-square test is evidence of the significant association between education and the country of origin of labour migrants. The frequency table indicates the higher education level of Nepali labour migrants to India in comparison to Indian labour migrants to Nepal. The majority

of the Indian labour migrants have below-primary education levels, while most of the Nepalese migrants have completed primary-level education before leaving their origin. The main reason for the education of Indian labour migrants could be their religious beliefs about education as most of them go to Madrasa for religious education and their formal education attainment is discontinued. They are compelled to join work due to their low-income family conditions.

It is further analyzed that the majority of Nepali labour migrants have better educational attainment than Indian labour migrants. The proportion of educational attainment of the labour migrants was around primary to secondary level education. GIZ/ILO (2015) also mentioned that the working age groups of labour migrants from Nepal have lower education and skill qualifications. The majority of Nepali labour migrants to India lack certified skills, making it difficult for them to reach formal jobs. The proportion of education attainment of Nepali labour migrants is found in increasing order till some secondary education; however, a large proportion of the Indian people do not have formal education, followed by some primary education and primary level education. The trend of migration in Nepal is found to be different than in India due to social and cultural background. In discussions with the Indian migrants' Muslim community, they prefer to go *to Madrasa* (school) rather than getting enrolled in schools for formal education because of their religious faith. Similarly, other Indian migrant communities in Nepal belong to poor and marginalized socio-economic backgrounds and are unable to join schools. However, in the case of Nepal, it has been studied that the majority of people prefer to migrate after completing school education.

Figure 3

Distribution of Labour Migrants by Education Attainment and Age Group
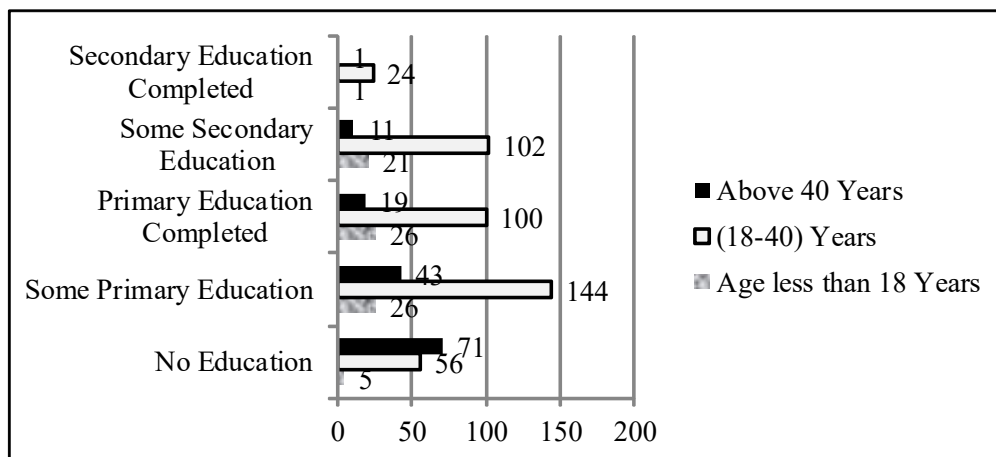
According to CBS (2012), the literacy rate of the population aged five years and above is 65.9 percent. The male literacy rate is 74.2 percent, and the female literacy rate is 58.2 percent. The literacy rate has increased slightly from 2014/15, as in the previous year; the rate for five years and above was 65.6 percent. The urban-rural difference in literacy for five years and above is found wide, with 75.9 percent in urban areas and 59.7 percent in rural areas. From the above figure, it is calculated that 3.8 percent of migrants under the age of 18 years, 42.4 percent of migrants between the age of 18-40 years, and 53.8 percent of migrants above 40 years have no formal education. Likewise, (3.8%, 92.3%, and 3.8%) of migrants have only secondary-level education during the age mentioned above groups.

In the focus group discussion, Indian labour migrants shared that they came to Nepal at an early age with their relatives. They mostly have a poor economic background and are hence compelled to do work at a younger age. They were involved in particular jobs and learned much to become skilled. Indian labour migrants belong to the Islam religion, where they should have been involved in Madrasa rather than formal education, which may be the cause of their poor educational attainment. However, in the case of Nepali labour migrants, the government has provided facilities for schooling in higher education. In compression to Indian labour migrants, Nepali labour migrants have better education status because of their socio-cultural and economic situation at their origin.

Family Status of Labour Migrants (Family Structure and Size)

According to the 2011 Census of Nepal, the average size of a family in Nepal is 4.6 persons, which is 4.2 in urban households and 4.8 in rural households. The percentage of nuclear households is 17.1 in Nepal. Nearly half (47.2%) of the household heads are in the age group 30 to 49 years, and 25.9 percent of households are headed by female members, which must be due to the high proportion of male labour migration.

Among the respondents, about 51.1 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 32.5 percent of Indian labor migrants are found living with nuclear families whereas 48.9 percent of Nepali and 67.5 percent of Indian labour migrants are found living as a joint family. In the case of Nepali labour migrants, the family size of migrants was 41.6 percent of 2-5 members, 54.6 percent of 6-10 members, and 3.8 percent of having more than ten members in a family. 29.6 percent are of 2-5 members, 58.9 percent are of 6-10 members, and 11.5 percent have more than ten members in a family. In both, 7 percent of respondent families have more than ten members.

Table 9

Distribution of Labour Migrants by Family Structure and Size

Family Status	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal		Both groups	
	(N)	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*
Structure of Family Nuclear family	189	51.1	91	32.5	280	43.1
Joint family	181	48.9	189	67.5	370	56.9
Pearson Chi-Square Test	Value		Df		Sig.	
	22.442		1		0.000	
Family Size of respondents						
Single	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2-5 members	154	41.6	83	29.6	237	36.5
6-10 members	202	54.6	165	58.9	367	56.5
>10 members	14	3.8	32	11.5	46	7.0
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0	650	100.0
Person's Chi-square Test	*Value*		*Df*		*Sig.*	
	19.965		2		0.000	

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Being the more significant number of respondents (63.5%) having more than five members in a family, it is assumed that family size is one of the causes of migration. To determine whether the structure of migrants' families and family size is associated with their country of origin, the Pearson Chi-square test is used where the p-value (<0.001) is less than the level of significance (0.01). It indicates that there is a correlation between the size of the family and the structure of the family in the country of migrants. It is worthwhile to mention here that family structure and its size can affect migration decisions (De Jong & Gardner, 2013), though there is less research on this topic in the Nepal-India context.

Schooling of Labour Migrants' Children

Almost all the children (school age) from Nepali labour migrants' families attended school but, about 42.6 percent of Indian children do not attend school due to their culture and economic conditions. Some of the children are schooling at the destination where their parents are working. About 63.7 percent of Nepali children and 80.3 percent of Indian children are joining government schools at their origin,

whereas 30.3 percent of children of Nepalese labor migrants are schooling at private (boarding schools). However, Indians are not found studying in private schools. The reasons for not studying in private schools are weak economic status and most of them living in villages where government schools are only available. Meanwhile, it is found that the children from migrant families, both Nepali and Indians, join schools in their working destination. About 20 percent of Indian labour migrants' children study in schools of Bhimdatt Municipality (Nepal) whereas 6 percent of Nepali labour migrants' children study in Indian schools.

Supporting the aforementioned data, there exists a case study involving an Indian laborer and his family who have been residing in Mahendranagar for an extended period. Prabesh Gupta, aged 45, hails from an economically disadvantaged family in Pilibhit, India, and made the move to Mahendranagar at the age of 14, accompanying one of the carpenters from his community. His formal education extended only up to the fifth grade, enabling him to read and write to a limited extent. He abandoned his schooling in order to secure employment and sustain himself.

Table 10

Distribution of Labour Migrants According to the Number of Their School Children

Number of School Children	Nepali Labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal	
	(N)	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*
Categories of School				
Govt. School (Origin)	128	63.7	90	80.3
Private School (Origin)	61	30.3	0	0.0
Schooling at destination	12	6.0	22	19.7
Total	201	100.0	112	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

In the initial stages, Prabesh faced considerable challenges while striving to meet the demands of the times and enhance his skills as a carpenter. Those days were exceptionally arduous for him. Nevertheless, he has since transformed himself into a prominent figure within the Mahendranagar carpentry industry. Currently, he employs more than fifty individuals, earning a substantial monthly income of nearly one lakh rupees. Additionally, he disburses daily wages of approximately one thousand rupees to his workers. He has ascended to the role of a reputable contractor,

frequently taking on two to three work contracts per day and hiring his team on a daily wage basis. Prabesh has firmly established himself in Mahendranagar, where he resides with his family. His children attend English medium schools in the area, and he aspires for them to follow in his footsteps in the same profession in the future.

According to him, he has bought a good piece of land and constructed a house in Pilibhit (India). His hard work and dedication to his work make him successful on his own. It has become a person who can create job opportunities for other people. He decides to live in Mahendranagar and follow the same profession. Many people from Mahendranagar go to different cities in India in search of jobs, although people like Prabesh Gupta are working in Mahendranagar and are willing to live here permanently. Thus, it reflects that a person with talent and skills can survive and create job opportunities for others as well.

To assess the circumstances of Indian labor migrants, the previously discussed case study serves as a representation of their livelihood strategy. A significant number of Indian labor migrants persist in their chosen occupations for extended periods and effectively manage their livelihoods. They also prioritise providing their children with an education at their destination. However, when it comes to Indian labour migrants engaged in brick industries in Nepal, their responses regarding their children's education are pretty similar. These migrants have yet to embrace a culture of schooling, maintaining a traditional lifestyle reminiscent of their ancestors. They have inherited the skill of brick-making and continue to follow this path.

Additionally, children from Muslim families within this group often reject the idea of attending school due to cultural practices and the emphasis on labor as a means for their children to earn income for the family. Consequently, they find themselves compelled to work to sustain their lives. In comparison, the number of school-going children among Nepali labour migrants to India is lower than that of Indian labor migrants to Nepal, primarily due to the uninterrupted nature of their employment at their respective destinations.

Travelling Hours and Crossed the Border

The Nepal-India border boasts 22 official entry points, with an additional six designated as immigration points for nationals of third countries, namely Banbasa-Mahendranagar, Gourifanta-Dhangadi, Rupadiya-Nepalganj, Sunouli-Bhairawa, Raxoul-Birganj, and Naxalbari-Kakarbhittta (Ministry of Commerce and Industry/ GoI, 1991). According to Table 5.5, a significant majority of migrants from both countries, accounting for about 94.9 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 96.8

percent of Indian labor migrants, traverse the border through the Gaddachouki entry point. In contrast, a smaller percentage, specifically 6.5 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 3.7 percent of Indian labour migrants crossed from the Brahmdev border. Additionally, a mere 1.4% and 1.8% of Indian labour migrants, predominantly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal, choose the Gourifanta and Sunouli corridors, respectively.

Table 11

Distribution of Labour Migrants by Travelling Hours and Means of Transportation to Reach the Destinations

Time for travel	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal		Both groups	
	(N)	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*
< 3 hours	-	-	235	83.9	235	36.1
3-8 hours	15	4.1	27	9.7	42	6.5
8-12 hours	174	47.0	11	3.9	185	28.5
12+ hours	181	48.9	7	2.5	188	28.9
Entry Border Points						
Bramhdev/Tanakpur	24	6.5	-	-	24	3.7
Gaddachouki/Banbasa	346	93.5	271	96.8	617	94.9
Dhangadi/Gouriphanta	-	-	4	1.4	4	0.6
Bhairahawa/Sunouli	-	-	5	1.8	5	0.8
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0	650	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Examining Table 11, further reveals that a substantial majority of Indian labour migrants (83.9%) reach their destination in Mahendranagar within three hours, owing to the proximity, while only 2.5 percent of migrants from West Bengal take more than 12 hours. Meanwhile, 47.8 percent of Nepali labour migrants, favoring longer distances, require 8 to 12 hours for travel, and 48.9 percent take over 12 hours to reach their destination. A minor fraction, comprising 4.1 percent of Nepali labour migrants and 9.7 percent of Indian labour migrants, cover the journey in 3 to 8 hours.

Frequency of Labour Migrants Returning at Origin

People do not usually move for work forever. More than half (51.9%) of Nepali labor migrants go back to their hometowns once a year. About 31.9 percent come back within six months, and 6.8 percent return during festivals or when they need to. On the other hand, 27.5 percent of Indian labor migrants go back home

every month because their workplaces are closer. They usually spend at least a day at home and then go back to work. Only 7.5 percent of Indian labor migrants come back within the year and 21.4 percent return when necessary.

Table 12

Distribution of Labour Migrants by Frequency of Returning at Origin

Frequency of returning at the origin	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal		Both group	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
At monthly	2	0.5	77	27.5	79	12.1
At half yearly	118	31.9	27	9.6	145	22.3
One time in a year	192	51.9	21	7.5	213	32.8
During festivals/As per need	25	6.8	60	21.4	85	13.1
During vacation/holidays	33	8.9	27	9.6	60	9.2
During Rainy season	-	-	68	24.2	68	10.5
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0	650	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

The study shows that how far someone has to travel for work affects how often they go back home. People who have to travel short distances usually go home every month, but those who travel long distances go home once a year. If someone goes back to their hometown more often, it is easier for them to celebrate their traditional festivals and keep up with their culture. However, Nepali labor migrants face a challenge because their workplaces are far away, and they cannot go home as frequently. This means they have fewer chances to celebrate festivals with their families. On the other hand, Indian labor migrants find it easier to celebrate with their families because their workplaces are closer to home. The distance to their work destination plays a significant role in how often they can be with their families for festivals.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of migration, it has been a common trend for Nepali individuals to seek job opportunities in India. Similarly, Indian people are known to migrate to Nepal for employment purposes. This migration pattern between Nepal and India is often referred to as circular migration. The majority of migrants in this exchange are typically males aged between 15 and 65, with a significant concentration falling within the 18 to 40-year age range. In terms of religious affiliations, a significant portion of Nepali labour migrants heading to India is

Hindus. In contrast, among Indian labour migrants, the Muslim community forms the largest group, followed by Hindus and Sikhs.

Additionally, Indian labour migrants, particularly those from the Muslim community, tend to have larger family sizes, which can be attributed to factors such as poverty. Larger family sizes are often a driving force for migration within Muslim communities. A key motivation for migration in both countries is the search for job opportunities, particularly among marginalized and socially disadvantaged communities. When it comes to education, Nepali migrants tend to have higher levels of educational attainment compared to Indian migrants. Some of the children of migrants enroll in schools at their parents' work destinations. The social and cultural aspects of these two groups of migrants differ due to their distinct geographical origins, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds.

The frequency of returning home for work migrants is significantly influenced by the distance they have to travel. Short-distance travelers, like Indian labor migrants, often go home monthly, facilitating easier participation in traditional festivals and cultural practices. However, Nepali labor migrants, facing the challenge of longer distances to their workplaces, cannot return home as frequently, resulting in fewer opportunities to celebrate festivals with their families. The conclusion drawn is that the distance to their work destination plays a crucial role in determining how often labor migrants can be with their families for festive occasions.

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