

Nepali Migrant Workers in Tourism Sector of India: A Case in Kerala and Goa

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Abstract

This paper examines how tourism employment and workplace experiences influence migrant workers' adaptation in the host society. Nepali migration to India is age-old phenomena. Most of literatures depicts to Nepali migrants in India are low-skilled, manual labourers. It is argued that tourism employment provides access to multiple social networks, which subsequently supports the improvement of foreign workers' social and cultural competencies. Such networks also help to compensate for the negative aspects of migrants and migration. Contrary of negative portraying, it resulted that Nepali migrants in tourism sector of India are in better off position. In addition, the paper considers how relationships among international workers inform chain migration and influence subsequent recruitment practices and migration experiences. The findings stem from a study of the experiences of Nepali migrant workers employed in the India tourism sector using qualitative data.

Key words: *Nepali Migrants, India, Tourism, Network*

Background

In the 21st century the tourism sector in service industries has become an important line of business. The phenomenon of globalization, all countries of the world as the relative wealth of the world's population increases and increased interest in the spread of the tourism sector and has increased the number of individuals involved in tourism activities. Migrants have historically formed a significant part of the tourism industry workforce (Baum, 2006; Choi, Woods & Murmann, 2000; Williams & Hall, 2000). It has been argued that this ongoing relationship between migration, migrant labour and tourism employment continues partly because a mobile international workforce offers a solution to labour shortages where the local workforce is not willing to engage in low pay, low status and seasonal employment (Choi et al., 2000; Williams & Hall, 2000).

Tourism and migration are highly tangible phenomena in the contemporary age of globalization. Estimated by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the number of international tourists in the world maintained its strong growth in 2018, with a rise of 6% to 1.3 billion people (UNWTO, 2020). At present, Asia and the Pacific account for approximately 30% of the world's global tourists and this area is expected to increase its incoming tourists more than any other over the next two decades. The UN World Trade

Organization (UNWTO) has introduced special programmes for increasing tourism for the purpose of alleviating poverty in various parts of the world, such as Nepal (UNWTO 2020). Since 1991, the number of India's incoming foreign tourists has increased four-fold to more than 6.5 millions in 2012. In 2019, almost 10 million foreign tourists visited India. This may be attributed to easy access to e-visas and other government schemes. Of the total foreign visitors, over 2.5 million arrived on an e-tourist visa. Similarly, the foreign exchange earnings from tourism have increased tremendously over this period (Government of India, Ministry of Tourism Statistics, 2020).

At the same time, the number of international migrants has increased dramatically in recent decades. The number of international migrants globally reached an estimated 272 million in 2019, an increase from 51 million since 2010. Currently, international migrants comprise 3.5 per cent of the global population, compared to 2.8 per cent in the year 2000, according to new estimates released by the United Nations.

Prior to 2000, it was most common with South-to-North migration, but in recent years there have been a tendency to increase South-to-South migration, that is, migrants from developing countries settling in other developing regions. Compared to other regions, Asia accounted for the largest increase of migrants since 2000 (ibid.). India is characterized with massive intra-national migration: an estimated 30% of the population is considered migrants. In addition, due to an open border treaty with Nepal, India has witnessed considerable inflows of Nepalis. The estimation of Nepalis in India varies between 1.8 and 3 million (Adhikari and Gurung 2009, p. 76). Nepal one of the least developed countries in the world has a population with a low level of education and is highly dependent on sending labour, a phenomenon that has increased since the Maoist conflict in the country. Thousands of men and women leave Nepal every day to work abroad (Migration Status 2020). Many of them, especially young men, migrate to tourist destinations in India to seek work in the burgeoning tourism industry.

The overall purpose of this research is to study Nepali labour migration in the context of increasing tourism in India. The paper focused on international migration, choosing the following geographical areas for research: Goa in western India, and Kerala in south India. These regions have common is that tourism is increasing every year, which attracts migrant workers as well as hotel and restaurant employees. However, there are important differences: Goa has attracted tourists for a long time, whereas Kerala, and especially Varkala and vicinity, is a comparatively young tourist destination.

This case study carried out in 2016 to 2017 among Nepali migrants in Kerala and Goa working in hotel/restaurants. This research is empirical, analytical, descriptive and explorative. The data are collected from primary and secondary sources. Primarily the

research is based on primary data. Most of the primary data is collected through the interview with migrants. The interviews were taken through purposive and drawn from the snowball method. Total respondents were 30 from Kerala and 20 from the Goa, India.

Fields and Context

Kerala has become famous for its comparatively high performance in terms of social indicators, strong trade unions, and educated population—the so-called Kerala Model of Development but also for the state's dependency on foreign remittances (31% of the state's domestic product) from Keralites abroad. In 2011 it was estimated that 2.28 million Keralites were living abroad, mostly in the Gulf countries. Although the economic benefits are substantial, the loss in human resources has also been apparent, as well as the cost of “brain-drain” (educating the youth to work abroad and remain there) (Zachariah and Rajan 2012). At the same time, the state suffers from a shortage of labour in some areas and the influx of domestic migrants from other parts of India or Nepal to Kerala is estimated to be more than 230,000 per year. The total number of migrants living in Kerala is estimated to 2.5 million, included in this estimation is a great number of Nepalis as well (Narayana and Venkiteswaran 2013, p. 11). Tourism has more than doubled in Kerala since 2005 and accounts for approximately 8% of the state's GDP (Mahalingam 2011). Most of the tourists come from Western countries, the US and Europe, but recently the number of Russian tourists and even tourists from the Middle East have also increased.

Goa shows a similar pattern like Kerala that a large share of the population migrates for work abroad, and the prosperity of the state is to a great extent dependent on foreign remittances. Migration to the Gulf countries has recently surpassed migration to other countries (such as Eastern Africa, Europe, and the US, Gracias 2000; Goa Migration Study 2008). Goa has other characteristics similar to those of Kerala: a relatively well-educated population and significant achievements in the health sector. After 1961, when Goa ceased being a Portuguese colony and was integrated into India, the immigration of people from other states in India has been encouraged. Today some Goans fear that migrants soon may outnumber original Goans, which is said to threaten the specific identity in the region (Mesquita, Government of Goa, NRI Commission 2006, <http://www.nri.goa.gov.in/articals.html>). Goa has been a destination for foreign tourists much longer than Kerala, and at present about 12% of all foreign tourists to India visits Goa. It is the stated intention of both the Indian national government and the state governments of Goa and Kerala to further promote tourism. The tourist boom in Goa has fuelled the construction sector and also attracted labour directly related to the tourist sector (i.e., the hotel and restaurant industry) (ibid; Noronha 1998). Many of those workers are originally

from Nepal. This study in 2017 revealed that many Nepalis working at tourist sites in Kerala had previously been employed in Goa.

The preliminary understanding is that Nepali labourers in Indian tourist areas are not unionized and suffer from bad working conditions, as has been shown in the case of Nepali workers in other areas of India (Adhikari and Gurung 2009; Kollmair et al., 2006, Barbora et al., 2008).

It was argued that the relationship between tourism and migration was under researched and that this nexus could open up for relevant interdisciplinary themes (Williams and Hall, 2000). There are several studies about male migration from Nepal to India (Hutt 1998; Seddon, Adhikari, and Gurung 2009; Valentin 2012; Sharma 2013). Varying from those in the field of Development Studies and Sociology to Medicine and Economy, they stressed the deplorable working conditions and discrimination Nepalis often suffer from vulnerabilities (Sharma 2013); how Nepalis use their networks and education in order to advance in society (Valentin 2012); Nepali men's sexual behaviour and risk for HIV-infection (Bam et al 2013;), Poudel et al 2006; Rao et al 2013; Vaidya et al. 2011), the socioeconomic implications of their remittances to Nepal (Thieme et al 2005; Wagle 2012). With regard to female Nepali migrants to India, studies thus far have mainly focused on Nepali women who end up in brothels in India (Datta 2005; Gunnell 2004; Wilson 1997).

Migration from Goa and Kerala has been examined in a number of studies (e.g., Barbora et al. 2008). The Centre for Development Studies in Kerala has a special unit dealing only with out-migration from Kerala (see, for example, Zachariah and Rajan 2012). A few studies focus on consequences at home due to out-migration, but very few academic studies on immigration to those two states exist. The Kerala Government did a study in 2013 with the intention of surveying the domestic migrants in Kerala. The purpose of the study was to estimate the number of migrants, look into working conditions, and provide the government with recommendations regarding actions related to these workers. It was estimated that about 7% of the migrants work in the hotel and restaurant sector.

Seasonal circular migration in India has been labelled as a common livelihood strategy of poor people (Deshingkar and Start 2003). There is a large body of academic literature on international labour migration within Asia, although less on South Asia (such as India and Nepal) than South East Asia and the Middle East.

Nepali Migrants in Tourism Sector

Although the paper only dealt with migration and tourism, its main focus is migration, with tourism forming the context and the setting. The concepts derive from migration theories. An interdisciplinary perspective is used, from such disciplines as labour history, South Asian Studies, development studies, gender studies, sociology, and social anthropology. This variety of disciplines shaped the theoretical framework. In Western theory in the field

of migration, the concept of “precariat” has recently gained prominence. According to Guy Standing, a professor of economics at SOAS and a researcher at the ILO from 1975 to 2006, globalisation has forced to the number of people into an emerging social class, is the precariat. It consists of various categories of people (young educated, industrial workers, temporary migrants, etc). In particular, Standing states that one-third of all migrants in the world move from one poor country to another. Standing re-introduces the medieval concept of *denizen*, a person who is not a full citizen, has some civil rights, but lacks economic, social, and political rights (2011). Since many of the Nepali in India are non-documented migrants working in tourist areas standing concepts, precariat and denizen, seem applicable to them.

However, one may also criticise Standing’s meta-narrative and stress on global structures. As Ronaldo Munck has shown, the type of workers denoted by precariat has generally been the norm in the global south. While such migration is not new in qualitative terms, the magnitude of migrants has risen exponentially in recent years. Munck, who also takes a structuralist approach, prefers to talk about increasing “dispossession and new surplus populations”. The ILO has adopted the term precarious work. Their goal seems to be a society with formal workers whose employment falls into the sphere of “decent work” (Munck 2013). Throughout the colonial world, people have struggled against becoming wage labourers in the name of modernisation. One may compare the attitude of seasonal workers of today with the aversion to wage labour among others in their position in earlier years. Migrants in Kerala, where unions have long had a strong position, may be compared with their counterparts in Goa. The perspective of Standing and Munck is that of a world system theory strongly focusing on economy. Others who explain mass migration have a neo-liberal or modernization theory approach, stressing the choice of individuals, and push and pull factors (Lessinger 1995;) The culture of migration has also been described as a rite of passage for young men (Massey et al. 1993, 1994; Osella & Ossella, 2000).

Data Source and Methodology

Although there is literature on the Nepali migration process and conditions for those migrants in Gulf countries (e.g., Brusle 2012), Chowkidars in Delhi (Theime 2006), much less is known about Nepalis who go to South India to work in the tourism sector. Our research should add to the knowledge of the Nepal–India migration pattern, especially since such migration has generally been of less research interest than international migration to the Gulf.

This paper focuses on a hitherto unexamined dimension of the interaction between migrant workers’ experiences and tourism employment: social relationships. More specifically, this paper considers three interrelated themes: firstly, how tourism employment facilitates the development of relationships between migrants and members of the host community;

secondly how tourism employment provides the context for interactions between migrants from different countries; and thirdly, how relationships develop between migrants of the same country of origin. It is argued here that these three types of social relationships and interactions influence the migrant experience of life in the new culture. This paper contends that these relationships can provide opportunities to develop social skills and cultural sensitivities.

Findings

This study showed that the majority of hotel and restaurant workers in Goa and Kerala are from western regions of Nepal. Some of them had been circulating in various tourist areas in Nepal and India for more than 25 years.

Although some of the interviewees in this study had been in India for many years, others seemed to be “yo-yo migrants” as Margolis has called them (1995), since they shuttle back and forth between India and Nepal. This may also be called circular migration, a concept that has received much attention and support among policy makers and experts at the World Bank, IOM, and EU, as well as from academics concerned with economics and migration (Constant and Zimmermann, 2012). The objective in trying to stimulate circular migration as development strategy is to arrive at a win-win-win situation: the receiving country fills its labour shortage, the sending country gets economic remittances and social benefits (Levitt 1998), and the migrant reduces his family’s poverty. However, several researchers within the field of development have asserted that this new circular migration offers no clear benefits to the migrants themselves (Skeldon 2009; Vertovec 2007).

Nepali migrants correspond to ideal type of transmigrants are characterized by the fact that their work, housing and life trajectories span between different locals in multi-local transnational social spaces (Pries 2001). Space created in India is not new and deeply connected with generations.

Choice of work

In fact, Indian labour market is livelihood strategy of Nepali workers since 200 years (Gill, 2003). Most of migrant workers status is temporary. The interview conducted for the present study showed that in Karala that migrant spent 2 years in Goa as a dishwasher and assistant cook in Kerala. It also shows that changing space also matters to upgrading their status as well. The other thing is that mostly Nepali migrants in Kerala and Goa did not spend money to get new job rather representatives of hotel/restaurant owner requested to join job and sent money for travel expenses.

Labour migration to India is a resource, as Neupane S, a migrant interviewed in Kerala, says: in India, we can go anywhere, does not matter how far it is. Work in Delhi or Kerala,

distance does not matter to me. I want to see new places as well. Designations in India are usually associated with a specific kind of job (Brusle, 2008). The job of watchman and car wash is famous in Delhi; Uttarakhand is famous for more seasonal and temporary jobs for Nepali migrants (Thieme 2006, Bashyal 2014).

The choice of work and destinations are also linked to availability of jobs, education, social networking and specific jobs, local are not interested to work. “The illiterate and less educated person, who could possibly do manual work at public projects, looks more towards long-distance destinations due to both social status and caste reasons”(Bora 1996). It is also applicable to Nepali migrants working in India.

This leaves room for the Nepali, whose notoriety directly derives from the Gurkhas’ martial image (Caplan 1995). Throughout India their reputations brave, hardworking, trustworthy, honest, and cheap labor makes them prized workers. This social labeling (Massey et al 1993) means that the Nepali are sought after solely on the basis of their reputation but it also confines them to lowly jobs, which are synonymous with “immigrant jobs”.

Generally Nepali comes for employment. Getting work is easy and also similarities in culture. Open border, visa free and geographical proximity are also causes for migration. Nepali who comes for seasonal does work for 3-4 months and go back to Nepal. Sometime they go for another tourist destination area like Laddakh and Hmanchal.

Result/Findings

This paper has considered the interactions between migrant relationships and tourism employment, with particular reference to the impacts these have on migration experiences and adaptation. Three types of relationships were identified, and the paper examined a series of outcomes and implications of the different types of relationship. Firstly, international relationships were created, as a direct result of the multinational make-up of the workforce. The data suggest that access to cultural diversity was a prized aspect of work in the industry, credited with an increase in inter-cultural knowledge, and acting as an important source of social support. These relationships also shaped migration experiences and thus contributed to the construction of a sense of cosmopolitan citizenship where individuals are connected to a diverse network of international people.

Although there is a view that ‘there has been increased labour mobility, both sectorally and spatially, that has contributed to the geographical dispersion of friendship and family networks’ (Williams & Hall, 2000, p. 8), this study reveals that social relationships are created and maintained through workplaces. Furthermore, the findings point to the existence of ‘occupational communities’, caused by irregular working hours, which form between tourism employees who work, live and socialize together (Lee-Ross, 1999; Riley et al.,

1998). Migrants are forced to mix with host nationals at the workplace and beyond, and this research illustrates how international workers may take advantage of this in settling, adapting and learning during their time abroad.

A further possible explanation for the formation of specific relationships between fellow workers and conational is that relationships morph into 'communities of coping' (Korczynski, 2003). These are informal, dense cultures among the workforce created to cope with abuse from customers. Service workers cope communally and socially; they bond to the job and to other workers. Such a conceptualisation can be further explained by recent debates in the labour relations literature related to 'teaming up' at work (van der Broek et al., 2008). This form of interaction has a potential to not only ameliorate the impact of customer abuse but also to undermine the strict pacing of work.

It is clear that those migrants employed in this sector of employment experience something that is absent in other settings. Tourism employment differs from other low-paid working environments, for example factories (see Wilczek et al., 2009), which offer much more limited host contact. Tourism work gives newcomers chance to integrate into the wider society as migrants' social, personal and professional lives are interlinked through their working environment. Furthermore, their language and cultural competencies are increased, thereby aiding their adaptation, although they may ultimately decide to adopt a monocultural strategy (Berry, 1994).

Conclusion

This research examined the process of migration and getting employment in a niche of the Indian labour market by Nepali labour migrants. Most labourers in our chosen tourist areas appear to be males, although there are some women who work in restaurants and hotels in Goa. The study also showed that Nepali migrant workers are bound to spend time in India because of economic factors. Sometime it becomes the tradition and compulsory. Working in hospitality sector is not because they had skill or education in this field but honesty and fair skin.

Working at Kerala and Goa are mostly considered to hotel/restaurant job. In Kerala and Goa, jobs are for short span of time means season for tourists. The choice of work and destination is also linked to availability of workers on this sector. Only reason for the Nepali migrants to be in India is to work or they say they regard their places of work does matters to a certain extent.

This study reveals that social relationships are created and maintained through workplaces. Furthermore, the findings pointed to the existence of 'occupational communities', caused by

irregular working hours, seasonal, which form between tourism employees who work, live and socialize together.

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