

Changing Trends of Migration in Nepal

Lumanti Shrestha

Department of Rural Development

Padmakanya Multiple Campus

lumanti73@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the changing trends of migration that have turned the world into a global village. The study focuses on how migration has affected all aspects of life including social, economic and demographic; and how it is affected by different factors like spatial variation in labour supply and demand, determined by economic concepts guided by wage differences, geographical opportunities and constraints. In the past, migration was limited to Tibet for trade and India for labour and trade. Later, as Lahure and British Gorkhali, they moved to Pakistan and India to serve as army. The major findings of this study shows that the top destination for the migrants who aspire for better survival are Malaysia, GCC countries remained the destination for economic reasons with moderate education level and the developed countries became the destination for high economic class step there for accomplishing their further study. The ratio of Male and female migrants has not only vast differences but also their prioritized destination also differs due to the kind of work they chose. Nepalese labour migration was badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to restriction despite having labour

approvals. Later many new destinations have been opened with options of work type. This article is mainly based on secondary data collected from different articles published in journals related to migration, regular reports published by CBS, NLMR, IOM and others.

Keywords: internal migration, international migration, destination, reverse migration, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

International Organization for Migration IOM (2008) defines migration as the change of residence by a person from his or her usual dwelling to others, within a country or across the border, temporarily or permanently for various reasons. Migration has converted the world into an interconnected global village since they left their place of birth and moved to a new place within the boundaries of their country or outside that creates the opportunities of attaining education, better job, learning new cultures and languages and others. The structure and composition of population in a country has been immeasurably affected by migration. Hence, it challenged firmly on population analysis that guide for the policy makers, the development agencies and stakeholders to plan for development agenda along with the budgets. As it is found to be one of the three factors affecting change in population of an area along with fertility and mortality.

The widely accepted definition of migration states the movement of people from their home to another city, state or country for a job, shelter or some other reasons. Shryock et al., (1975) defines migration as a geographic or spatial mobility by changing residences between clearly defined geographic units permanently.

The trend of migration has been changing with the demand of time. Migration seems ambiguous as it is influenced by varying nature of pull and push factors. Data from Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) has presented the changing patterns of mobility particularly based on the purpose, duration and season. generally, the internal migration was tempted for land, employment and opportunities of trade were quite common in the past which has now been less significant due to the increasing trend of emigration for better education and better jobs (K.C, 2003).

Mobility for trade and seasonal migration were mandatory for the survival of people in high mountains and some of the indigenous people leading a mobile life. References can be taken from Nepalese traditional trading communities from central mountain region namely, Thakalis, Manangba and Loba, Sherpas and Walongchung Bhotiyas from eastern mountain region, and Byansi and other Bhotia from western mountain region had high mobility ratio until late

1950s that considerably declined after China's invasion of Tibet in 1959 (Baral, 2021).

Migration of a particular place has affected all aspects of life including social, economic, demographic, environmental, political and others. All these can be broadly classified into classical approach and modern approach. The classical approach reflects that migration is determined by spatial variation in the demand and supply of labour. It is determined by economic concepts guided by wage differences, geographical opportunities and constraints (Westerlund & Wyzan, 1995). Whereas, the modern approach considers social capital at micro and macro level (Faist, 1997; Faist, 2000).

The extreme increase in transnational migration has grown over the last three decades is influenced by poverty, conflict, social, environmental and political factors, lack of employment opportunities, and the demand of skilled and low-skilled migrant workers with higher wages in the intended countries. In the case of women, the patriarchal ideology, gender disparity, discredit for women's contribution, violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) from husbands and the family members could be considered as the influencing factors (McCarthy, 2021).

The historical approaches reveal social, political and economic situations as the influencing factors at different periods of both internal and international

migration. In addition, various studies show that Nepalese from different backgrounds (class, gender, caste/ethnicity, and geographical region) are influenced by different situations for making decisions for migration. Further, the changes in migration trends in Nepal have also been owed to demographics, educational levels and quest for better futures.

World Bank (2019) estimates that out of the 38 million South Asians migrants, most of them get low and semi-skilled jobs. Different studies clearly illustrate that a multi-dimensional theoretical analysis of both internal and external political economy is essential to explain the historical trend of migration. This requires refined knowledge on Nepalese social composition including class, ethnicity, gender and region and others. In this context, this study aims at seeking the factors affecting the change in trends of migration in Nepal. This study aims at exploring the various factors that influence the changes in the trends of migration in Nepal. For this, the number of migrants and their destinations, the effect of migration on the economy of the family and the country, the effect of COVID -19 on international migration, reverse migration and the newer destinations for the Nepalese migrants.

Methods and Materials

A systematic review of the literatures related to trends of labour migration were collected purposively as secondary data, from articles published from

various journals, books, series of Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Migration Research Network (IMISCOE) and Nepal Labour Migration Report (NLMR). These materials were collected from Google search engines and official websites and records for the qualitative analysis.

Result and Discussion

Theoretical perspectives of Nepalese migration

Massey et al. (1993) applied 'dual labor market theory' to explain international migration from political-economic perspective of labour demanding countries where they demand foreign labor from poorer countries for a secondary sector labor intensive physical and less prestigious work and employ local people for a primary sector capital-intensive work. This theory can explain Nepalese labour accepting the 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult) with the minimum wages in foreign countries due to their poor economic condition. Network theory and social capital theory reflect the willingness of labour migrants accepting less-paid jobs that are less-worthy for their dignity. Thus, once they earn the amount of money they desire, they leave the job. Network theory explains two types of networks; a network between labor sending and receiving countries and other is a relation through kinship, friendship, and

shared community origin (Boyd, 1989). It shows that every migrant is linked to non-migrants for creating a pathway for others to migrate.

A study in Nepal reveals that migration enhances financial social capitals ensuring good education of their children, skill enhancement, increased assets as there is lowered risk in migration through network and social capital (Thieme & Wyss, 2005; Wyss, 2004).

Thieme (2005) conceptualizes 'social capital (networks of related persons)' with ethnicity to explain Nepalese migrants to India. This study also examines the relationship between ethnicity and migration pattern in Nepal. This study revealed that education, economic resources, different forms of discrimination, and historical legacies of migration are the three mechanisms that spread through social networks that facilitated to clarify the choice for their destination.

Trends of Internal Migration in Nepal

Nepali migration is largely influenced by unequal distribution of resources, economic and social deprivation, difference in labour demand due to topographical variance and so on (K.C., 2003). Till the fifties, Terai region of Nepal was adversely affected due to high prevalence of Malaria, After the successful control of Malaria, significant increase in migration from Hill and Mountain areas to Terai could be documented. Limited arable land, lack of

infrastructure and educational opportunities, unemployment are some of the push factors of migration to Terai from the Hills and Mountains. Further, immediately after the control of malaria in the Terai experienced the massive migration from Hills and Mountains due to the availability of arable land, employment opportunities and better infrastructural facilities. The resettlement program set up by the government in the late sixties also facilitated this migration process.

Internal migration in 1971, was only 445,128, that includes 3.9 percent of the total population. In 1981, the number increased by 108.8 percent to 929,585, including 6.2 percent of total population. Likewise, in 1991, the number increased to 1,228,356, which is 6.6 percent of total population and it increased by 32.1 percent. Similarly, the number of internal migrants in 2001, was 1,727,350 which was 7.46 percent of the total population, an increase by 40.6 percent compared to the 1991 census.

Trends of International Migration in Nepal

In the past, migration across the border was limited to Tibet for trade and India for labour and trade. Later, as Lahore and British Gorkhali, they moved to Pakistan and India to serve as army. The demarcation and delineation of Nepal India international border under the provision of the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, the agreement between Nepal and British India encouraged Nepalese males

from Mountain and Hill regions to join the army in British India (Kansakar, 2003).

The 1981 census reported that 2.7 percent of the population of Nepal i.e. 4,02,977 migrated to India of whom 89.3 percent were from the Mountain and the Hill regions. Similarly, the 1991 census shows 3.6 percent of the population comprising 6,58,337 emigrated which was 63.4 percent more than in the previous census. Correspondingly, CBS 2001 shows that 762,181 people (25.20%) were absentee. Likewise, the number reached 1,921,494 and 2,190,592 in 2011 and 2021 respectively CBS (2021).

There are three main categories of emigrants from Nepal for work. The first migrating to India due open border, secondly those who migrate to Malaysia, Gulf countries and other middle-income countries to work in contract, and thirdly those who migration to developed countries including Europe, Australia, Japan, and North America. Among all, in the first two categories the ratio of migration is increasing rapidly as compared to the third one. It is found that migration to the developed world has been dominated by the privileged people who can afford high costs and hold the degree of higher professions like nursing, medical and engineering education required for migration.

From the lens of gender, although male domination is clearly perceived (Castles & Miller, 2009), female migration has increased to the West Asian countries for

servicing as housemaids or nurses (Siddiqui, 2008 in the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Kuwait, giving residence to almost 15 million people from the South Asian region. (Rajan, 2023)

The total migrants and their destination

Baral (1992) reflects India as a ‘safety valve’ for Nepal during a decade-long political conflict period (Maoist movement 1996–2006) when people migrated there to earn their livelihoods. Later, they started to migrate to Malaysia and Gulf States for better income and those moving to India declined extremely. United Nations (2020) estimated that a large majority of migrants from South Asia including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh reside in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain (Baral, 2021). More than 80 percent of Nepalese have migrated to the GCC, the UAE—and Malaysia since 2013/14.

Table 1

Total Population and Absentee as Foreign Migrant Workers and their Destination

Year	Total Population	% Increased	Absent Population	% of Absentee	% of Absentee in India	% of Absentee in other countries	Male %	Female %
1911	5,638,749							
1920	5,573,788	-1.15						
1930	5,532,574	-0.74						

1941	6,283,649	13.58	87,722	1.4	-----	-----	---	---
1952/54	8,256,625	31.40	198,120	2.34	-----	-----	87.6	12.4
1961	9,412,996	14.01	328,470	3.37	-----	-----	---	-----
1971	11,555,983	22.77			-----	-----	---	-----
1981	15,022,839	30.0	402,977	2.61	93.1	6.9	81.5	18.5
1991	18,491,097	23.09	658,290	3.44	89.2	9.8	83.2	16.8
2001	23,151,423	25.20	762,181	3.24	77.3	22.7	89.2	10.8
2011	26,494,504	14.44	1,921,494	7.25	37.6	62.4	87.6	12.4
2021	29,192,480	10.18	2,169,478	7.43	-----	--	81.28	18.72

Source: CBS 2021

Table 1 shows that in 1981, 93.1 % of the migrants (absentee population) went to India and only 6.9% to other countries. But by 2011 only 37.6% of the migrants went to India and 62% to other countries. India still remains the popular destination for the people from the poorest regions of Nepal i.e. Far-west and midwest regions (Baral, 1992). Likewise, despite lesser increase in the population (14.44%) in 2011 and (10.18%) 2021 as compared to previous censuses (25% in 2001, 23% 1991, 30% 1981), the absentee or migrated population was only 7.25% in 2011 and 7.43% in 2021 which was lesser than half in the previous years.

The factors influencing the destination of the migrants

Income in destination countries

The income in India and Nepal is not that different. Thus, the majority of Nepali migrants go to Gulf States (Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) and Malaysia for significantly higher income. Of all, the majority 32% migrated to Qatar, 24% to Malaysia, 17% in UAE and Saudi Arabia during the period of

2015–2019. Studies have shown that the earnings of the migrants to Gulf and Malaysia is Rs 34,871 per month (equivalent to USD 328) in 2016 which was five times as much as in Nepal, (IMF, 2020). Similarly, a study of Nepal Rastra Bank in 16 districts shows that a youth could earned Rs 90,521 annually in Nepal and it was Rs.532,000 for a youth working in foreign countries, which was more than five times more than working in Nepal (Adhikari, 2017b).

Gender of the Migrants

Using the lens of gender, the destinations chosen by male migrants are UAE, Qatar, Malaysia, Jordan, Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey respectively. Whereas females who work mainly as domestic helpers choose UAE, Qatar, Malaysia, Kuwait, Jordan and Cyprus respectively as their destination, which account for about three-fourth of the female migrants (IOM, 2019).

National and International Policies

The new policy of the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) in 2022 permitted the Nepalese migrants to Central and Eastern Europe-Albania, Croatia, Poland, and Romania—and Cyprus and Turkey in West Asia as the new prominent destinations (DoFE, 2022). The labour approvals for Nepalis going to the United Kingdom (UK) increased by 95 per cent in 2021/22

compared to 2017/18 due to withdrawal of the UK from the European Union resulting in labour shortages and introducing various temporary visas by the UK government for migrant workers for seasonal work. *The Guardian Newspaper* and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, UK, reveals that between January and March of 2022, Nepal ranked the fourth highest among the list of source countries for seasonal workers, while the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, placed Nepal ninth on the list the previous year (NLMR 2022). In March 2016, the Government of Malaysia efforts to encourage hiring of its own citizens resulted in a ban on hiring of new foreign migrant workers lessened migrant workers from Nepal in 2015/16 (MoLE, 2018).

Effect of migration on economic development

Labor migration has a significant role in determining the socio-economic status of Nepal and its nationality with the flow of remittances since 1990 even though there were fluctuations from time to time. (Adhikari, 2021). The globalization process coincides with political change in Nepal in 1990 has opened up opportunities for the low-cost workers from Nepal to newly industrializing countries for contract work. In 2018/19, Nepal received around USD 8.3 billion, which is equivalent to 30% of GDP (World Bank, 2019). In 2021, Nepal received USD 8.2 billion (ca. NPR 1.06 trillion) as remittances

equaled 23.8 percent of Nepal's GDP (the tenth highest globally on that score) (Ratha et al., 2022).

Due to increase in migration and remittance inflow, the household receiving remittance increased to 55.8% in 2010/11 from only 23.4% households in 1995/96 (CBS, 2012). The remittances received by households also increased significantly by almost 14 times from Rs 15,160 in 1995/96 to Rs 204,782 in 2016. The contribution of remittance was 26.6% of household income in 1995/96, which increased to 62% in 2016 (CBS, 2012; IMF, 2020).

It clearly reveals that remittance flow from different destinations has significance not only on the socio-economic development of the remittance receiving families but also contributes to the GDP of our nation.

Effect of COVID-19 on Migration and reverse migration

Migration

COVID-19 overturned migration patterns worldwide in 2019/20 and 2020/21 as the borders were shielded by many countries of destination since February 2020. From 12 March 2020, the Government of Nepal also took a break from issuing labour approvals till the last week of August 2020. It affected 115,000 migrants who were held from going abroad despite receiving labour approvals, and the 325,000 workers receiving pre-approval letters (Mandal 2020). Since June 2020 onwards, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of

labour approvals issued. Consequently, the number of labour approvals issued in 2021/22 rose to reach 630,089, nearly matching the record numbers of 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Reverse migration

The data of migrant workers who returned to Nepal was significantly different until COVID-19 pandemic. Lesser number of them returned with skills and knowledge after they were sure about their secure future including paying off their loan, having a house or a piece of land of their own, providing better education for their children and among others. Insignificantly, many of them returned with no choice after being the victims of the fraud agents and companies. Apart from that, many others return penniless, losing parts of their body with bare hands after being injured in an accident while working for the companies. Until then the repatriation has not got significant attention.

The issue of reverse migrant workers particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic has been receiving increased attention for the repatriation of a large number of these migrant workers for utilizing their skills in Nepal. On 5 June 2020, the COVID-19 Crisis Management Coordination Centre (CCMCC) began repatriating Nepali citizens, with 26 Nepalis from Yangon in Myanmar. In six months, by January 2021, the number reached 235,907 from 86 countries via rescue flights (CCMC 2021). Due to restrictions on migrant

workers because of COVID-19, who returned through the Tribhuvan International Airport was only 203,934 in 2020/21 and 470,978 in 2021/22. As restrictions on mobility were released, there was a rapid increase in returnees due to loss of employment, depletion of savings and fear of COVID-19. The number of returnees was 94.2 percent and 93.3 percent, respectively, in 2020/21 and 2021/22 (NLMR, 2022).

It was reported that before the announcement of lockdown in March 2020, nearly 200,000 migrants to India have returned to Nepal and thousands of them were stuck at the Nepal-India border (IOM, 2020). The GCC countries and Malaysia report the highest returnees were there in 2020/21 and 2021/22, which is obvious as most Nepali migrant workers go to those countries. Likewise, UAE confronted most migrant women returnees as it is the primary destination for women migrant workers as compared to men immigrated from Jordan, Cyprus, East and Central European countries and other Asian countries (NLMR, 2022).

Table 2

Returnees from foreign countries

Countries	No. of Returnee
India	7,70,695
SAARC (except India)	3,538
Middle East	76,054
ASEAN	35,531

Other Asian countries	10,593
European Union	1,482
other European countries	2,188
UAS & Canada	1,673
S. America/ Caribbean country	166
African Country	708
Pacific Ocean region country	1,118
Other	317
Not- stated	255
Total	9,04,318

Source: CBS 2021

The above table shows that India has the highest number of returnees, followed by Middle East countries and S. America/ Caribbean countries have the least number less than 200.

Government Policies for reintegration of returnee

Nepal government permits Nepalese to work in 128 countries as of 2018/19. However, the number was reduced due to the rapid increase in migrant workers in 2016. Reports from MOLESS show that still the female migrants reached only 5% during the decade 2008/09 to 2018/19. Now Nepal has established diplomatic relations with 179 countries. Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq have been blacklisted due to security reasons so that Nepalis cannot go there for foreign employment MOLESS (2022).

Both the 15th Plan (2020-2024) and the Annual Development Program (2019–2020) have merged migration as a crucial matter, especially emphasizing

labour migration and the reintegration of returnees for rural development. The 15th Plan highlighted the effect of the lack of migration governance on evidence-based policymaking regarding migration-related issues and the evaluation of the adverse effect of migration on efficiency of the development process. The document emphasizes on the needs of self-employment by motivating the returnees as well as the local dwellers focusing on sustainable development in rural areas.

Conclusion

This study analyzes the trends of migration in Nepal which was limited to Tibet and India for trade and labour was dramatically transformed to the intention of migration to other destinations for earning and educational purposes. The finding reveals that the choice of destinations can be broadly categorized into three groups. Firstly, people from poor socio-economic groups, who emigrated to India and earn not much more than in Nepal. Secondly, those who belong to the middle-income group and migrate to Malaysia, Gulf countries and other middle-income countries for remarkably higher income. Thirdly, those from higher economic class migration to developed countries like Europe, Australia, Japan, and North America for higher education and earning purposes. Lately, the number of migrants to the UK has increased significantly after its withdrawal from the European Union.

Likewise, newer destinations to Central and Eastern Europe Although male dominance is prevalent, feminization of migration has expanded for serving as housemaids or nurses.

The study also shows that a migrant to the Gulf and Malaysia could earn five times as much as in Nepal. The study also shows that remittance flow from different destinations contributed both to socio-economic development. Nepal received around USD 8.3 billion, which is equivalent to 30% of GDP. In 2021, the receipt of USD 8.2 billion as remittances equaled 23.8 percent of Nepal's GDP.

Further, the major destinations chosen by male are UAE, Qatar, Malaysia, Jordan, Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey whereas the females are UAE, Qatar, Malaysia, Kuwait, Jordan and Cyprus respectively. However, the change in national and international policies attract the Nepalese migrants to different new countries like in Central and Eastern Europe, and the UK.

COVID-19 affected adversely on emigration till August 2020 due to suspended borders even after receiving labour approvals.

Though there are returnees with skills and knowledge after paying off their loan, having a house or a piece of land of their own, providing better education for their children, insignificantly there are many of them who returned with no choice being cheated by the fraud agents and companies. Many others return

penniless, losing parts of their body with bare hands after being injured in an accident while working for the companies. Only after the COVID-19 pandemic, the government paid attention to the repatriation of these returnees for utilizing their skills in Nepal in the 15th Periodic Plan. The Nepal government allows the Nepalese migrant to work in 179 countries, including Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq which have been blacklisted due to security reasons.

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