History of Population Migration in Nepal

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Nepal is a land of ethnic diversity. It is the result of successive immigration from north and south. The ethnic diversity is the most characteristic of the hills, which have been the protective sanctuaries for the ethnic groups of the Indian origin fleeing from the powerful enemies and political persecution and for the ethnic groups of the Tibetan origin, coming from harsh climate, the Nepalese hills became a pleasant habitat. Emigration became dominant only after the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by King Prithvinarayan Shah and the subsequent territorial expansion of the country.

The first settlers in the valley of Nepal (the Kathmandu Valley) seem to be the people from the north. The legend of Manjushree coming from China, draining away of the Kathmandu Valley lake and the subsequent rehabilitation of people provide some clues to the earliest settlement by the people from the north. Because of the prevalence of malaria in the Terai the intercourse between Nepal and India was more difficult than the journey through terrain of Tibet to Lhasa and Peking.\(^1\) The facial features of the original inhabitants of the Middland's of Nepal, their tribal culture and the Tibeto-Burman language they speak,\(^2\) provide strong evidences of settlement by the people form the north. However, the origin of the indigenous settlers of the hills, such as Newars, Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus, Jirels, Chepangs, etc. lie in obscurity. Migration of the people from the north was of voluntary nature in search of best land for cultivation and grazing, while that from the south was of involuntary or forced nature in search of secured place for shelter. The Sherpas, the Bhotiyas, the Thakalis, the Manangbas and the Lepchas seem to have migrated from Tibet, but their settlement in Nepal had little or no impact on the social life of the indigenous settlers as they settled in those environs which were of marginal

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value to the indigenous settlers. On the other hand, the immigration of the people from the south had a pronounced impact on the social and economic life of the indigenous settlers. During the life time of the Buddha, the Lichhavis, the Mallas and the Shakyas took refuge in the Terai and the valleys of the Himalayas when their lands were occupied by Ajatashatru.

The Lichhavis entered the Nepal valley around 200 A.D. by defeating the Kirats, the original inhabitants of the valley. Before the birth of the Buddha the Shakyas have their domain in Kapilvastu in the western Terai and the Mallas in the Karnali basin. The Lichhavi rule in the valley is said to have ended at the close of the tenth century. There is, however, a hiatus of 200 years between the end of the Lichhavi period and the rise of the Malla period and during that period King Nyannadeva from Karnatak (India) is said to have entered the valley, but no historical evidence is available of this entering the Nepal valley.

The Muslim invasion of India marked the another important chapter in the immigration of the people from India. The Mallas seem to have entered the Kathmandu Valley from the eastern Terai at the end of the twelfth century, while the Shah (the present reigning dynasty and the descendants of the Rajputs of Chitor, India) from the western Terai in the fourteenth century and established their domain in Gorkha. The intruding refugees were in such large number that they encroached upon the fertile land of the indigenous settlers and drove them to the slopes of the hills. Deserted chortens and prayer walls found below 1500 metres above sea level and belonging to the adherent of the Bon Po doctrine of the Tamangs and the Rais are the evidences of the displacement of the original inhabitants of the Midland valleys.

In 1350 A.D., there was Mulsim invasion in the Kathmandu Valley led by Sultan Samsuddin who not only plundered by valley but also destroyed temples aed shrines and burnt many religious and other manuscripts. The Muslims were, however, permitted to settle and carry on trade in the valley during the reign of Ratna Malla in the fifteenth century. The Capuchin Missionary driven out of Peking across the Himalayas was given land grant by Jagat Jyoti Malla of Patan and settled there. But before

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5 Hagen, op. Cit., p.62.
they could make any progress in conversion, came the Gorkhas, who expelled them from the country with their converts and they settled in Bettiah (Bihar). ⁶

Immigration from India into Nepal as secured place for shelter against suppression from the powerful enemies and from the fear of political persecution stopped after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. However, immigration from densely populated Ganga lowlands of India for cultivation and for trade continued. Prior to the formal recognition of Nepal's independence by the British Government, the Nepal Government showed its reluctance to open the Nepal Terai to the Indians. The formal recognition of Nepal as an independent country by Britain in 1923 was followed by reclamation and development of transportation in the Tarai and resulted in the large scale immigration of the Indians in the Tarai.

During the Second World War when the Japanese overran Burma, a large number of Nepalese settled in Burma returned to Nepal. After the installation of democracy in the country in 1951 a large number of people, some who had voluntarily domiciled and some who were forced to exile in India during the autocratic Rana regime returned to Nepal. The eradication of malaria in the Chitawan Valley in the mid-fifties of the present century and the subsequent resettlement programme by the Government further augmented immigration from India, both the people of Nepalese and Indian origin. During the Tibetan rebellion in 1959, a large number of Tibetan refugees entered Nepal and the number is estimated to be not less than 16,000.

In 1964 Nepal once again witnessed the immigration of the people of Nepalese origin from Burma when Burma enacted the Burmese citizenship act of 1964. Those who showed their reluctance to accept Burmese citizenship returned to Nepal in large number. The Government had the difficulty of rehabilitating them. However, they have been rehabilitated in the resettlement areas of the Tarai and the Inner Tarai.

Nepalese in Assam are experiencing some friction with the native population over the use of Land. ⁷ The use of the Gurkha troops of the Indian Army to quell the Naga and the Mizo rebels further sparked of the

hostility. In 1967 about 8,000 people of Nepalese origin fled from the wrath of the Mizo tribesmen when the trouble broke out.8

During the liberation movement of subsequent independence of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) the hostility between the indigenous Bengali speaking population and the Urdu Speaking population (Bihari Muslims) resulted in the suppression of the later and as a result a large number of Bihari Muslims took refuge in Nepal. The Bihari Muslims numbering more than 10,000 are said to have entered Nepal from the eastern Terai district of Jhapa lying proximity to Bangladesh. So far only a few thousands of them have been repatriated to Pakistan and most of the remaining refugees are concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley.

Quite recently the flood havoc in the areas of India bordering Nepal have also resulted in the influx of the affected people in the Terai districts of Nepal.

Emigration

The ancient history of the country indicates emigration of the Nepalese in the north. During the Lichhavi period, emigration of Nepalese scholars, artisans, and traders was responsible for the spread of Buddhism in Tibet and China. When Bhrikuti or Bri-btsun, the daughter of King Amshuverma, was married to King Srong-tsan-gampo of Tibet she was accompanied by many Buddhist scholars, religious teachers,. Craftsmen and painters. During the period of King Narendra deva, a mission of artists headed by Araniko went to China. During that period Nepalese traders established trading posts in Lhasa and at the second half of the seventeenth century Bhim Malla further strengthened the position of the Nepalese traders in Tibet.

The conquest of the Kathmandu Valley marked the large scale emigration of the Nepalese in India. After the conquest of the valley by King Prithvinarayan Shah, large number of nobilities of the Malla Kings of Kathmandu,. Lalitpur and Bhaktapur fled to India for fear of political persecution. The aged King of Bhaktapur and the mother and the window of King Jayaprakash Malla were permitted to spent the rest of their days in Benaras.9

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The death of King Singh Pratap Shah, son of King Prithvinarayan Shah, was followed by period of regency, in which power always changed from one hand to another and the consequential internal strife and court intrigues amongst the ruling nobility were marked by murder and exile of different nobility at different periods. The main place of exile is Bensras (India) which has been the place of refuge for the political leaders of Nepal and has been a hot-bed of intrigue and plots for restoring royal exile to Nepal.10

During the territorial expansion of the country the Nepalese emigrated as far as the Teesta river in the east and the Sutlej river in the west. However, emigration was augmented by the peace treaty of Sugauali and its modification according to which the British Government was entitled to raise three regiments of the Nepalese hill people in its army.11 Prior to that the Nepalese hill people were also employed in the Sikh Army of Ranjit Singh (Punjab) and also bodyguard of the Khan of Khelat.12 The Nepalese Government was, however, on principle against the recruitment of its citizen in the British Army. It was alleged by the British Government that the Nepalese recruits in the British Army coming on leave to Nepal were beheaded instead of being sent back to India by the Nepalese Government. In order to make the recruitment easier the British Government established Gurkha settlements in India. The largest of the colonies was in the Kangra Valley where it spread from the early settlement of Dharmashala and Baklohl. Others are at Darjeeling, Dehradun and Shillong.13 From eastern Nepal for more than hundred and fifty years, migration has continued to Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan. In Darjeeling and Sikkim people of Nepalese origin constitutes more than three-fourths of the total population and one-third in Bhutan. Tea gardens in Darjeeling and orange plantations or timber workings in Sikkim are the most important avenues of employment of the Nepalese. Nepalese also migrated to Assam and the practice of granting rice plot to the plantation workers by tea estates seems to have augment large number of Nepalese in Assam.14

During the period of Prime Minister Jung Bahadur, a force of 5000 Limbus was stationed in the cantonments at Kathmandu. When cholera

14 Davis, op. cit., p.117.
epidemic broke out it led to the death of some hundreds of them, and caused many families of the Limbus who dreaded conscription to migrate to Darjeeling. The growing change throughout the world and in the neighbouring countries aroused enthusiasm among the intellectuals of the country for the rights of the people. When the autocratic Rana regime got the hint of their activities some of them were put behind the bars and some of them exiled to India. Political exiles continued up to the end of the Rana Government.

Migration of the Nepalese farther east in Burma started at the beginning of the present century when they were recruited in the Burmese Military Police. Nepalese, however, settled in the hills of northern Burma. The enactment of the Burmese citizenship act of 1964 virtually stopped emigration to Burma. It is estimated that there are more than 200,000 people of Nepalese origin in Burma.\(^{15}\)

Emigration of the Nepalese overseas in the past was conditioned by the existence of 'Pani Patia' (caste purification). Any Hindu who went overseas was automatically out-caste and the ceremony performed to readmit him in his own caste is known as 'Pani Patia'. Formerly it was imposed for those who crossed the India-Nepal border, but it was relaxed after the realisation that movements to India involve pilgrimage also. The issue took a serious turn, when the Raj Guruju (Royal Priest) refused to give 'Pani Patia' to the Gurkhas who went to China to quell the Boxer rebellion in 1900.\(^{16}\) The controversy remained until 1920 when it was agreed that those going abroad on active service will not be outcaste. Later on the high ranking Rana officials took the lead in breaking down this orthodoxy.

During the World War I, more than 200,000 Nepalese hill people were recruited in the British Indian army representing nearly 20 percent of the eligible male population of the country.\(^{17}\) The magnitude of movement of the Gurkhas for recruitment in the British and the Nepalese armies was so great that able-bodied males from the villages of the martial races like Gurungs, Magars, Rais and Limbus were difficult to get during the War.\(^{18}\) The Nepalese Government expressed its desire that the Gurkhas should be

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\(^{15}\) Lall, op. cit., p.346.
encouraged to return home on serving the army.\textsuperscript{19} But many thousands and thousands of the Gurkhas, having been to India as also having seen a great deal of foreign countries, were loathe to go back to their hard working life in the mountains and preferred to work in India either as watchman or even in the police under government or in many positions available to them, for many Indian merchants have a great belief in the Gurkhas as honest and loyal servants.\textsuperscript{20} In the World War II recruitment was many times heavier – 12,000 Gurkha recruits were raised for 1944-45 season alone.\textsuperscript{21} The large scale absence of able bodied males in the hills had resulted in the deterioration of agriculture, as such the then Rana Prime Minister requested the British Government to sent back the Nepalese on completion of their duty. But there had been greater difficulty than ever before in getting the discharged soldiers to return their home. And a large number of the Gurkhas, released in 1946-47, made only short visits to their homes before coming back to India for civil employment.\textsuperscript{22} Emigration of the hill people for recruitment in the Indian Army is still continuing. By the treaty of 1953 the British Government was empowered for five years to recruit from Nepalese territory Gurkhas soldiers for British Army overseas and for which permission was given to establish recruit depots in Dharan and Bhairahawa which the British Government is still maintaining. In the mid fifties of the present century there was a large scale recruitment of the Nepalese from the hills in the British Army to quell the communist insurrection in Malaya. During the India-China war in 1962 also large number of the Nepalese hill people were recruited. In the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1965 and 1971 also large number of the Nepalese hill people were recruited in the Indian Army.

In absence of well-paid and suitable jobs, Nepal is experiencing the drain of highly educated manpower in the recent years. The exact number of brain drain is not known, but their destination seems to be U.S.A., U.K. and Canada.

Today Nepalese are to be found in India, Sikkim, Bhutan, Pakistan, China, Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Fiji, Guyana, etc.

\textsuperscript{19} H.M.S.O., op. cit., p.61.
\textsuperscript{20} Bruce, op. cit., p.217.
\textsuperscript{21} Hussain, op. cit., p.252.
\textsuperscript{22} H.M.S.O., op. cit., p.131.
Internal Migration

Internal migration in the country in the past was conditioned by the prevalence of malaria in the areas below 4,000 feet above sea level. Internal migration was confined to the Midlands and migration usually spread east-west. The Terai and the Inner Terai of the country in the past was covered by dense sub-tropical forests and was highly malarial. They were the abode of the indigenous people like Tharus, Danuvars, Jhangars, etc. who were immune from malaria.

In the past Nepal was divided into principalities. Expansion of principalities was usually followed by emigration of the vanquished and immigration of the conquerors.

The conquest of the Kathmandu Valley marked the important chapter in the history of internal migration in the country. Large number of people from Gorkha migrated to Kathmandu Valley and with the eastward expansion of the territory population movement spread further eastward. The widespread occurrence of the Gurungs and the Magars whose original home is in the western hills and who constituted the bulk of the army of the Gorkha Kingdom is the result of the territorial expansion of the country eastward. Prior to the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by King Prithvinarayan Shah Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, the capitals of the three principalities of the Valley, had their own independent and flourishing trade. The conquest of the Valley in 1769 and consequent declaration of Kathmandu as the capital of the country badly affected the trade and industry of Patan and Bhaktapur. Thus, in order to regain the lost prosperity the traders and the artisans of Patan and Bhaktapur gradually migrated to other parts of the country.

Internal conflicts and tensions within the royal family and the intrigues of the nobility marked the period of regency of King Rana Bahadur Shah. The Prime Ministership of Nepal changed from one family or faction of nobility to another and each change was followed by a bloodbath and exile of the different nobility and their supporters.

Prior to the Anglo-Nepalese war, the Inner Terai valleys were reclaimed and cultivated, but after the peace treaty of 1816, the Nepal Government, from the strategic point of view, caused the inhabitants to abandon the greater past of them, and they were allowed to revert to their
natural state of forest and jungle,\textsuperscript{23} because the malarial jungle provides strong line of defense against the advance of any army of invasion from the plain of Hindustan,\textsuperscript{24} and the malaria had brought to an end more attempted raids into Nepal and has buried more political hopes than will ever be known.\textsuperscript{25}

During the period of King Rana Bahadur Shah, a severe epidemic of small-pox broke out in the Kathmandu Valley. Out of the fear of his son being infected with small-pox, the king drove away children and even new born babies who were susceptible to the infection out of the Valley. A song, composed on relating to that incident, indicates that they were driven away as far as the Tama Kosi river in the east.

The period of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher was marked by large scale movement of the Nepalese within and outside the country. In 1903 the Rana Government provided 4000 yaks and later on large number of Sherpa porters for the Younghusband Expedition to Tibet.\textsuperscript{26} The discovery of Chumbi valley of Sikkim as a trade route from India to Tibet and subsequent trade treaty with Tibet decreased the importance of Nepal as a trade route between India and Tibet. This badly affected the people living in the north, e.g. the Bhotiyas, the Sherpas, the Manangbas, the Thakalese etc. who used to supplement the meager agriculture resources by carrying on trade with Tibet. The Sherpas seem to have migrated to the south in the Midlands which are almost a paradise compared to the harsh climate to which they are accustomed; and also to Darjeeling, the trading outpost of India near the Tibetan border. There are evidences of depopulation of the Inner Himalayan valley as indicated by abandoned elaborate terraced slopes and towns lying in ruins.\textsuperscript{27} The shifting of trade had affected the Kathmandu Valley as well. While some of the traders and the artisans seem to have moved to Kalimpong (Darjeeling) and Sikkim, others seem to have migrated to other parts of the country. The conclusion of the trade treaty with Britain in 1923 and the unrestricted import of manufactured goods from Britain gave another blow to the already dwindling indigenous industry and trade of the Valley and had resulted in the migration of the traders and the artisans within and outside the country. Since 1769 the Newar artisans and the

\textsuperscript{23} Oldfield, op. cit., p.49.
\textsuperscript{25} Oldfield, op. cit., p.47.
\textsuperscript{26} Balachandra Sharma, Nepalko Aitikasik Ruprekha, (The Historical Outline of Nepal), Varanashi, 1951, pp.256-57.
\textsuperscript{27} Hagen, op. cit., p.63.
traders were gradually moving outside the Valley and they are responsible for the development of important settlements and towns in the Midlands. All the Newars outside the Valley share the tradition of having their origin in the Kathmandu Valley. When slavery was abolished in the country in 1926, the emancipated slaves numbering 51,782 were rehabilitated in Bichhakhori which was later named as Amlekhganj (town of emancipation).

The installation of democracy in the country in 1951 was marked by large scale movement of the people within and outside the country which was restricted during the autocratic regime of the Ranas. The Kathmandu Valley being the hub of the country's administration, education and trade most of the internal migration was destined to the Valley. Though the magnitude in national context has declined yet the trend is continuing.

The malaria eradication programme conducted under the tripartite agreement of the Government of Nepal, United States Operation Mission and WHO in the Chitawan Valley for the first time in 1956 and the subsequent rehabilitation of the hill people marked the large scale migration of the hill people in the Inner Terai for the first time in the country's history. Malaria eradication in the other parts of the country was followed by concurrent migration of the hill people in these regions. The magnitude of migration was so great that the migrants outnumbered the land set aside for settlement and encroached the forests set aside for reservation and wild life protection. The official attempt to evacuate the illegal occupants in these areas was marked by riots and bloodshed. Recently the illegal occupants in the reserved forests of Tamagadhi have been rehabilitated in the Inner Terai region of Nawalpur. In the recent years the Government is following policy to clear forest all along the Terai belt of the India-Nepal border. The illegal felling of the trees by the Indians and stealing them to India has compelled the Nepalese Government to clear the forest all along the border for resettlement. Due to the large scale migration of the hill people in the Terai and the Inner Tarai abandoned houses are appearing in the hills.  