

Brain Drain among the Gurung Community: A Diaspora Case Study

Dirgha Man Gurung, Ph. D.

Abstract

From the ancient time, Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country. This Himalayan country offers the world communities rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and legendary images with historical significance. It has always already been proven that the brave Nepali people sacrificed their lives for national unity, territorial integrity and the world peace. Despite its size, Nepal is rich with geographical, social, religious, and cultural diversities let alone ethnic variety with the perfect harmony. People observe various festivals and jatras (carnivals) during different seasons. The people from various castes and ethnic communities with various feasts and festivals, rites and rituals, and myths and ethnicity have made immense contribution to the nation building. Gurung is one of the rich indigenous ethnic communities in Nepal which in recent decades has suffered severe problem of brain drain because of an increasing trend of globalization as well as their recruitment in foreign armies. Descending from hills of Nepal, Gurungs as mercenary soliders in foreign armies, including the British, Singapore and Indian have made immense contribution to the formation of Nepali Diaspora in Asia and beyond. Such an increasing trend of formation and expansion of the diaspora has adversely resulted in the brain drain from Nepal, a severe challenge to Nepal's plan of progress and prosperity

Keywords: Gurung community, ethnic groups, Nepal, brain drain, and diaspora

Introduction

Nepal is a small country that lies between India and China but it has rich in cultural, religious, and natural diversities. As this country is famous for its natural and cultural beauty and Gurkha soldiers, it has its salient character and identity in the world. Geographically, it is divided into three parts namely: mountains, hills and terai. Mountains, hills and the terai cover 15%, 68%, and 17% of the total land area, respectively (Department of Land Reform 2057). Unlike this, from administrative point of view it has been divided into 77 districts and 7 provinces (*Constitution of Nepal 2072*). Federal democratic republican system established with the force of people's revolution has been institutionalized and the *Constitution of Nepal 2072* written by representatives of people has been promulgated. The same constitution is functioning now.

The country full of geographical diversity has different land forms like plains,

mountains, naked hills, gorges, passes, valleys, lakes and rivers. Because of this uniqueness, it has been able to attract the people from both the north and the south. People from more than hundreds of castes and ethnic groups live in Nepal. Bramhins, Kshetries, Tamangs, Gurungs, Magars, Kamis, Newars, Rais, Limbus, Chepangs, Rajbansi, and Gains are some of them (Ke. Ta. Bi. 73). They belong to the following six groups: Arya, Mangol, Negrito, Agneya, Drawid, and Paschimibritamunda (Sharma 39). Aryans and Mangols are in majority, however, other groups also live over there.

For the first time, Mangols enter Nepal through the Tibetan plateau. After that Aryans enter Nepal along the land of India (Thapa 2). Though these groups are living here, they had their origins somewhere else, may be east, west, north or south. At the same time, there are no empirical evidences about how long they have been living in Nepal.

Due to geographical diversity, multiple ethnic people are living in different places. From these geographic variations emerged different cultures. People with their respective cultures continued interacting with members of different communities which resulted in expansion and promotion of their cultures. All of these cultural varieties have become Nepali national cultures. Nepal is full of cultural heritages and natural resources. Unity in diversity is a special feature of Nepal. Therefore, it is famous as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country in the world. There are varieties not only in terms of geography, living organisms, and climatic condition, but also in terms of caste, language, religion, and culture. The people from different caste, ethnicity, and even aboriginal people are living in Nepal from the ancient time. Sherpas, Bhotes, Lepchas, Dolpos, Thakalis and Tangwes live in the Himalayas, whereas Gurungs, Magars, Brahmiins, Kshetries, Rais, Limbus, Tamangs, Thakuris and Newars live in the hills. Similarly, Tharus, Rajbansis, Dhimals, Satars, Meches, Santhyals and Musalmans live in the terai region. Therefore, Nepal is a melting pot of various castes and ethnic groups. Since the people from different religions live in this country, they practice different traditions, including Yaks' blood sucking tradition, the tradition of corpse feeding to the vultures, and fortune telling by looking at the kidney of animals offered to the Gods. Some people even wear very heavy ornaments amounting 7 kilos and at the same time there exist very peculiar jatras in Nepal.

Different castes and ethnic groups have their own problems. Like other castes, Gurungs are also facing several problems. If we can make those problems public, it will be easier to study ethnicity.

Objective of the Study

Gurungs are living in Nepal for a very long period of time in history. They are the

native ethnic groups in Nepal. The main objective of this study is to introduce Gurung community and shed light on their contribution on their political, economic, social, administrative, cultural, military, and educational domains. Apart from that, this study aims at highlighting the problems faced by the Gurung community.

Research Methodology

The materials required for this study have been taken from both primary and secondary sources. The interviews taken from the experts are the primary sources whereas the books and journals are secondary sources in this study. Explanatory approach has been used in this study. This research paper explores a development economics issue of the Gurung ethnic group of Nepal in the diaspora. The farm life of the Gurungs in rural areas in ancient time gets to the urban space with the rise of Gorkha kingdom during the mid –eighteenth century. Gurungs then get to the western imperial forces as mercenary soliders in the British and Indian Armies which have recent years been taken by the foreign laborers in Europe and America beyond Asia.

Delimitation

People from different castes and ethnic groups are living in Nepal from the ancient time. More than one hundred castes and ethnic groups are living in Nepal. It is not possible to discuss the problems faced by all these castes and ethnic groups in this short write up. Therefore, the problems faced by Gurungs have only been discussed in this article.

Gurungs

Gurungs are one of the Mangolian groups living in Nepal. Past study shows that Gurungs enter Nepal through China. For the first time Gurungs lived in the surrounding area of Annapurna and Machhapuchhre (*TamuSuta* 1) At present, KholSuthar is supposed to be earliest residence of Gurungs (Gurung 2068:24). Later on, they migrated to different parts of Nepal, India and abroad. Out of total population of Nepal, which is 2,64,94,504, Gurungs' population accounts for 5,22,641 (Ke. Ta. Bi.72). In terms of population, gurungalso command very large portion. They are only after Chhetries, Brahmins, Magars, Tharus, Tamangs, Newars, Musalmans, Kamis, Yadabs, and Rais. That is to say, they are the 11th biggest caste in terms of population. Gurungs live in all 14 zones of Nepal. However, mainly, Gurungs live in Kaski, Lamjung, Syanja, Tanahu, Gorkha, Parbat, and Manang districts of Gandaki zone. Gurnugs participated in several walks of life in Nepal from the beginning. Following are the main domains of Gurungs' participation.

Political Domain

Ghale kings used to rule over Lamjung and Gorkha before unification (Gurung, 2034:8). During unification campaign, Ghale kingdoms also were united into larger Nepal by Shah kings. Therefore, the ghale kings didn't exist. Even then, Gurungs had helped Prithivi Narayan Shah during unification. JutheGurung had got martyrdom during the war of Kirtipur, whereas SardarBanshuGurung had been able to chase away British troop from Sindhuligadi (Gurung, 2041:28). Similarly, JhagalGurung had disguised himself as a singer (Gaine) and had killed the brother of ParshuramThapa secretly, which he reported to Prithivi Narayan shah later. In the history of unification, this contribution of JhagalGurung is always appreciated. Before Prithivi Narayan Shah had attacked the Kathmandu valley, the brother of ParshuramThapa was planning to attack Gorkha with the help the 24 states and 22 states. This plan was in the notice of Prithivi Narayan Shah and he was even afraid of him. PrithiviNanayan Shah, after consultation with his advisers, had selectedJhagalGurung for this purpose.JhagalGurung had provided a remarkable contribution during unification campaign.

During the revolution of 2007, against the Rana rulers, BuddhasinghGurung, BirjangGhale, Krishna BahadurGurung, HapuGurung, Min BahadurGurung etc. took part actively (Adhikari, 1998:115). After the end of Ranarchy, we had general election in the year 2015 B.S. In the cabinet headed by Prime Minister Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala, Min BahadurGurung and JamansinghGurung had become the ministers. But unfortunately, late King Mahendra took over power and started Panchayat System. During Panchyat era also several Gurung personalities had become the ministers. Among them were: khagendrajung, Ganesh Bahadur, Dr. Harka, Dut Prasad, Nara Bahadur, PoornaBahadur, BhadraKumariGhale, PemaChiring, Lal Singh,Bakhansingh, kshetraBahadur, Dharma Bahadur, and LakshyaBahadur. The first Gurung lady minister is BhadraKumariGhale. In a similar fashion, during the people's revolution of 2046 B.S. that was targeted against the Panchayat System, many Gurungs took part actively. That resulted into the end of Panchayat system and establishment of multi-party democracy. In the cabinets formed after that TulBahadur, K.B. Ram Bahadur, Palden, Mahadev, PrakashBahadur, JagatBahadur, and ToranBahadurGurung had become ministers. Likewise, during the people's movement 2062/063, Gurung personalities participated very actively. That particular movement ended the monarchy and established the federal republic. In the republican system also DevGurung, KiranGurung, and Parbat Gurung became ministers. Prithivi Subba Gurung is the Chief Minister of Gandaki Province. In this way, gurungs have been actively participating in the political domain of Nepal.

Economic Domain

Agriculture and animal husbandry are the main occupations of Gurungs. As

agricultural products, they used to grow paddy, millet, maize, barley, wheat, and potatoes. Similarly, in animal husbandry, they used to keep cows, buffaloes, and sheep. In the past, they used to keep a large number of sheep numbering 500 to 600 (Pignet 128). They used to take their flocks to the heights during summer, whereas they used to take them to the lower villages during winter.

The bravery of Gurkhas displayed during the war of 1814-16 had impressed the British people. They wanted to recruit the Nepali people in their army. Therefore, during war era, the British authority recruited the war prisoners in their army. After India became independent, there took place a three party treaty involving Britain, India and Nepal. According to the treaty, the ten regiments Gurkhas in the British Army were divided into two groups for the service of Britain and India. Four regiments including second, sixth, seventh, and tenth one were supposed served the Britain army whereas, remaining six regiments were for India. Apart from that, both Britain and India could recruit the Nepali nationals in their army. Because of handsome salary, people took this military service as economic matter. This is how Gurungs started making their earnings from this military service. That is to say, Gurungs took the Gurkha military service as a means of earning. The tradition of Gurkha military service still prevails in both Indian and British Army. Apart from this, a large number of youths go to Korea, Japan, Hongkong, Britain, Malaysia, and Dubai for employment. At present, Gurungs also are going to the different parts of the world for income generation. Others are involved in business and industries.

Social Domain

Since man lives in the society he is a social being. Humans have unlimited wants and needs. An individual cannot fulfill his/her needs oneself. Humans are bound to take help from others. This establishes interrelationship among the individuals. As a result of interdependence and interaction among each other the society is formed. The organizational form of different castes, ethnicity, religion, occupation, language, culture, and gender with a collective objective is called the society. People fulfill their individual opportunities through the society.

Within the society, there are communities from different castes, religion, and cultural domain. Community is an organ of the larger society. The culture, norms and values of any community is interlinked with the society. Therefore, the society owns the religion, culture, tradition, and values of all communities. They have their own social importance. The collective total of all activities of an individual is the social status of that society. There are caste-wise and community-wise diversity in the society. Gurungs are one of the dominant ethnic groups in Nepali society.

An individual cannot exist without the society. Gurungs from the ancient time lived around the mountains and the hills. They usually live in groups comprising of

at least 20 houses in a cluster. There are 700 houses in Ghandruk village whereas, there are 600 houses in Siklesh (*TamuSuta*31). In the rural areas, their houses are made up of stones, mud, and woods. At the same time their doors and windows are smaller in size. Their yards are stone cobbled. Similarly, they have stone cobbled paths to move from one house to another. They build many paths for people to walk from one place to another. People are puzzled in some villages as they have extremely big number of paths. Since they are from mongoloid group they have round face and wide chest. They have their typical clothes and attires. They usually eat rice porridge (dhido), dal, curry, pickle, milk, curd, and whey. They use their own language for communication. They mostly work in group. Helping in need and behaving lovingly are the main characteristic features of Gurungs.

Administrative Domain

Being impressed by tactfulness and bravery of Gurungs, Prithivi Narayan shah had appointed them as the chieftains (umrawas) of different administrative units (Gadhis, Gaudas, Thums). Umarawas were the administrators of concerned area. These administrators could arrange the army and weapons for security, to establish settlements, and fight against the enemies. They could even decide on several cases, excluding five offences (pancharbata). Prithivi Narayan Shah had appointed Amar Ghale to the post of Barpak and Lalgurung to the post of Uparawa of Siklesh and Khilang(Gurung, 2041:260). After unification, Gurungs were appointed to the high ranking posts. After Prithivi Narayan Shah's death also, his successors followed the same path. Later on, Gurungs were appointed to the post of Dware. Dwares were supposed to collect revenue and decide cases with minor offences. Jaya Gurung was appointed as Dware of Goppa-Chhepar and TularamGurung was appointed as Dware of Raginsah (Gurung, 2041: 25).In this way, Gurungs were appointed to the respectable posts like Uparawa and Dware. Umarawa would give final verdicts on all cases, other than Panchakhata (five principal offences). Gurungs were appointed to different administrative posts like Kaji, Amali, Dware, Taxari and Mukhiya. In nutshell we can say that Gurungs played important roles in nation's administration and many of them are still holding high ranking administrative posts.

Cultural Domain

In the past people developed several rituals, traditions, beliefs, arts, and other material things they require for them to survive. So to speak, culture is also man made entity. Broadly speaking, culture comprises of rituals, costumes and attires, religious assumptions, and languages. More than that it comprise of economic and social activities that represent a particular group of people.Gurung community also has its own unique culture.

Gurungs observe different rituals from birth to death. Lamas, Pachaus, and

Ghyabris perform their rituals, therefore, they are their priests. Some Gurungs have their rituals performed by the Brahmin priests. Rodhis, Ghatus and Sorathis are the main identities of Gurungs. The youths sing and dance in the rodhis. They exhibit Ghatus and Sorathis during special occasions. They celebrate the 15th of Poush as the beginning of new year. On this day, they worship the god for peace, prosperity and longevity of life. After that they enjoy feast followed singing and dancing. Thote is one of the special festival of Gurungs. They celebrate this festival on the last Tuesday of Shrawan and the last Tuesday of Chaitra. They celebrate this festival with a view to protect their village from evils.

Since Gurungs are rich for their cultural practices they are well known in the international arena. Therefore, international researchers like Bernard Pignet, UichoPhurukawa, Alen Make Pharlen, DonaldMesersmtata, Ilan Andros etc. lived in Gurung villages and studied the Gurung culture (Rodhi 21). Gurung culture has been a matter of interest and curiosity for foreigners.

Military Domain

Gurungs started joining the army from the time of Drabya Shah in Gandaki Region. Drabya Shah had visited Gorkha from Lamjung along with his Gurung armies. Prithivi Narayan Shah was highly impressed by the bravery of Gurungs. Therefore, he stated that the army comprising of the Khasas, Magars, Gurungs, and Thakuris would be very strong and reliable. Being impressed by the skills of Gurungs in the battlefield, Kalibahadur battalion, comprising of Gurungs only, was established (Gurung 116).

Gurungs, including TularamGurung, had fought bravely during the Nepal-Tibet-China war 1791-92. Similarly, the war between Nepal and Britain 1814-16 was extremely important from view point of protection of national existence and sovereignty. During this war Subba Prahlad Gurung had fought bravely and got martyrdom. His bravery is highly appreciated in the history of Nepal. Similarly, Bharat Gurung also fought gallantly during the Nepal-Tibet war 1855-56. At present, some Gurungs are serving as high ranking officials in the Nepali Army.

International Domain

British people were highly impressed by the bravery of Nepali soldiers, who displayed their skills during Nepal- Britain War 1814-16. They wanted to recruit Nepali nationals in their army. In reality, they recruited the Nepali youths during the war time. This started the tradition of recruiting Nepali youths in the British Army. As a part of British Army Nepali youths fought during the First World War and the Second World War.

During the First World War and Second World War Gurungs had fought from the side of Britain. Both wars concluded in favour of Britain . Being impressed by the bravery of Gurungs, warriors Gaje Ghale, Bhanubhakta Gurung, Lachhiman

Gurung, and Thaman Gurung were awarded with the top most medal of British empire The Victoria Cross (Rodhi 44). Therefore, Gurungs are famous in the world as innocent, honest, gallant warriors.

Educational Domain

There are many Gurungs who are highly educated in Nepal. Some are doctors and technicians, whereas others are PhD holders. PhD holders are famous nationally and internally in their fields. These scholars have been leading the Gurung community now. In the past Gurungs served the nation as cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, university professors, members of National Planning Commission, administrators, and researchers.

Problems of Gurung Community

As the whole nation is facing so many problems so is the case with the Gurungs. Despite their glorious past, Gurungs are facing the following problems.

Unemployment: There are very limited highly educated Gurung youths. They are not getting employment opportunity due to the lack of education. Therefore, many of them are unemployed.

Increasing Class Discrimination: there is wide gap between the haves and have nots among the Gurung community. Some are living their luxurious life, whereas others are living in poverty without even daily foods.

Erosion of Culture: As many Gurungs go abroad they forget their own culture and practice the foreign culture. Therefore, there is the danger of extinction of Gurung culture which they have been practicing for a long time in history. Many of them have stopped their own cultural practices like foods, clothes, language, festivals, and rituals and have adopted the foreign culture.

Change of Religion: Many Gurungs, being impressed by the western practices, have changed their traditional religion and adopted the foreign religion. This has brought a threat to the traditional culture and religion of Gurungs.

Addiction: many Gurung males are living in the foreign countries, whereas their wives are in Nepal. Due to the illiteracy prevailed among Lahures' wives the children go unruly in drug addiction and other illegal acts since they have money but not proper counselling.

Investment in the Unproductive Area: Many Gurungs are, instead of investing in the productive areas like industries, they are building houses and buying personal vehicles and luxurious items.

Speedy Migration: Many economically sound Gurungs are migrating to

the cities with modern facilities. As a result, only a limited few are living in the rural areas. If this process continues, there may be no Gurungs in the villages.

Lack of Nationalistic Feeling: Many Gurungs go abroad during their early age and come back home in their old age. In a sense, they don't have the feeling of doing something for the nation.

Lack of Higher Education: Gurung children usually study up to class 12 only. After that they don't focus on the higher studies.

Brain Drain: Gurung children, instead of being the pillars of nation building, are going abroad so as to settle there. Therefore, brain drain is a burning problem. There are many problems of the Gurung community. It is not possible to discuss all of them in detail in this short write up. In this article, only brain drain has been highlighted.

Causes of Brain Drain

Agriculture and animal husbandry were the main sources of income for Gurungs. Britain started recruiting Nepali youths early from the Nepal Britain war of 1814-16. Since then Gurungs also joined the British Army. This is also supposed to be the beginning of foreign employment. Gurungs took Gurkha recruitment as economic matter. Gurkha recruitment alone was the means of foreign employment for Nepali people at that time. After India became independent, Britain divided the ten Gurkha regiments between India and Britain. They took some Gurkhas with them and left the others for India. Since then both India and Britain recruited Nepali youths in their armies. In this way, Nepali youths generated income by joining the British Army and the Indian Army.

Only Britain and India were the foreign lands Nepali people could go. But later on the government of Nepal signed on the agreements with other countries also and started sending Nepali youths there. Nepal has signed on the labour agreement with more than one hundred countries. Japan, Korea, Britain, Hong Kong, Canada, America, Australia, France, Germany, Singapore, Iran, Iraq, Southy Arabia, Katar, Malaysia, and Dubai are some of them. Gurungs also are going to these destinations. In the beginning, males alone went to join the foreign employment, but nowadays, even the females are going there.

Going abroad is not a bad thing. Going abroad with required knowledge and having influence in the foreign land will be the matters of pride for all of us. There are Gurungs like Dr. Harka, Dr. Chandra Prasad, Dr. Ganesh Man, and Dr. Jagaman Gurung, who are influential internationally. But at present, many Gurung youths are going to Japan, America, Malaysia, Britain, Korea, Germany, Hong Kong, Belgium, Arab, Dubai, Katar etc. spending a lot of money for livelihood.

Following are the reasons why they go abroad:

- There are not enough employment opportunities in Nepal even if the citizens are educated. On the other hand, they earn very low salary.
- The parents/guardians are not able to guide their children properly. Therefore, the children stop their studies before they have reached the higher level. Even educated citizens are unemployed, let's put the uneducated ones aside.
- Since the parents give their children more money than they require, they are extravagant. Even if they do a job in Nepal, their salary is not enough for them to spend.
- They see many Nepali nationals making a lot of money in the foreign land and they also want to do the same.
- Since their parents are living abroad they develop an attitude that they too, go abroad one day.
- They are spendthrifts.

Because of these and many other reasons, many Gurung youths are going abroad. They cannot get high class job there and they have to depend on low class job. This has negative impact among Gurungs.

Conclusion

From ancient time, there lived the people of different castes and ethnicity in Nepal. All castes and ethnic groups practice their own rituals and cultures. Among the Nepali people, there is high feeling of tolerance. Therefore, in Nepal there is unity in diversity. Gurung, like others, is one of the ethnic groups living in Nepal. Gurungs are the aboriginal people of Nepal. From ancient time they have contributed a lot for development and nation building. They have contributed in different walks of national lives and internationally also they are famous as dutiful and brave warriors. As a result of their bravery, they received the world famous Victoria Cross. They have made Nepal known by the international community. It is unfortunate, despite their national and international fame and recognition, they are going abroad for a very small purpose. They are going abroad due to unemployment in their own land. They have mainly gone to Hong Kong, Korea, and Britain. Apart from that they have gone to the other countries also. Many of them are living there permanently. Therefore, there is a big problem in the Gurung community. If this process continues there will be children, old people and women in Nepal as male youths are away. In this case, there won't be Gurungs to contribute in different domains of Nepal like political, economic, social, administrative, cultural, military, and educational; and will surely lose their forefathers' pride. There is a threat that due to the lack of leadership,

Gurung community might vanish. It is advisable that the Gurung youths will think it seriously. The youths of today are the nation builders of tomorrow. This community requires those individuals, who are proud of their forefathers and will contribute parallel with them. Brain drain is the main problem of the Gurung community. Gurung community should, therefore, focus on education and encourage the new generation to live at home, create employment opportunity and serve the nation.

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