

## Embarking on a Journey: A Comparative Study of Selecting Ideal Migration Destination among Nepalese and Indian Labor Migrants

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### Abstract

Indian labour migrants come to Nepal in search of better opportunities and at the same time, larger size of Nepali labour migrants migrate to different cities of India. The objective of this study is focused to describe and compare the migration process of labour migrants between Nepal and India. With pragmatism paradigm of post-positivism, mixed methodology (QUAN-qual) has been implemented to explain the research questions, where quantitative is predominant methodology. Quantitative method included survey with a sample of 650 households and qualitative method included one focus group discussion with both migrants group and two key Informant Interviews (KII) having long experience and knowledge in Nepal-India migration. For this research, Bhimdatt Municipality of Kanchanpur district is selected for the study area. The study showed that about 30 percent people from Bhimdatt Municipality migrate to the capital city Delhi. Similarly, 16 percent to Karnataka, 11.4 percent to Punjab, 10.6 percent to Maharashtra, 7.2 percent to Uttarakhand, 6 percent to Haryana and others move to Gujarat, Himanchal Pradesh, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. This finding challenges Revenstein's theory of migration in which the distance between the origins determines the volume of migration between place of origin and destination i.e., higher the distance, lower the volume of migration and vice versa. The main source of information seems to be generated with relatives and friends (50.9%) for both the migrants. The movement of Nepali labour migrants is found to different big Indian cities with longer distance however Indian labour migrants to Nepal choose near distance as their destination. Near distance, open border and social relationship (network) are the main causes of selection of their particular destinations.

**Keywords:** *Comparative study, Labour migration, Migration destination, Nepal and India*

### Introduction

Migration is the process of movement of people from one place to another place as per their requirements and betterment of livelihoods. It has been starting since the beginning of the evolution of human being. International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2015) defines migration as movement of individuals or a group across countries and within a single country. It usually crossing administrative boundaries made during a given migration interval and involving a change of residence (UN, 1993). Labour migration is a common phenomenon both within developing countries and between them and the developed countries. The high level of labour migration has led to a modification in the structure of family life and has transferred the social and economic position of the family (Chand, 2013).

Labour migration is a major livelihood option in the rural areas of Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces. ICIMOD (2010) highlighted that the main cause of out migration from these regions is food insecurity. According to report, seasonal migration usually took place for 4 to 6 months and was mostly to hill and mountain areas of India like Nainital, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Ladakh, and Himanchal Pradesh. A large portion of the Indian migrants in Nepal are from the lesser developed Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. A number of them migrate to Nepal due to higher wage rates in the destination companies. The key reason for migration to Nepal is due to marginally higher wage, no work permit required and near to boarder areas. In general, people from hilly Sudurpaschim region migrated to terai as permanent migrants while to India as seasonal migrants. Likewise, some resourceful people also migrated towards Gulf countries, Malaysia and other third countries. Easy access of lower-class jobs and less expensive to visit than gulf and other countries is main causes of migration towards India (Bhatt, 2015). Due to lack of access of right information about the nature of jobs and destination, limit awareness level and illiteracy, far western hilly people are not able to select their right destination and suffered trouble in destination. They are not able to earn money as they desired and hence become harassed and return to their origin soon with empty hands. They generally select their destination from the support of their

relatives, friends, and occasionally from contractor. They choose area rather than nature of jobs it is because of their weak economic condition, lack of awareness and limited knowledge about the job and destination. Due to unmanaged and traditional migration, India migration (foreign employment) is not economical and socially prestigious (Bhatt, 2016). Some working papers and scholars presented the limited findings on the issue of labour migration from Nepal to India only and very limited informal reports showed about the Indian labour in eastern terai and Kathmandu city (Basyal, 2020; Bruslie, 2008). There is still a study gap to understand the migration process between Nepal and India. In this context, this paper compares and contrasts the situation of migration process between both countries.

## Research Design and Method

Research is designed with mixed method with a strong emphasis on quantitative methods. The qualitative study assisted in capturing and generating meaning from participants' experiences and feelings. For gathering the qualitative data, field observation and key informant interviews were conducted with individuals who had extensive experience and knowledge of Nepal-India migration. Bhimdatt Municipality of Kanchanpur District is selected as the study area. According to municipality report (2019) of Bhimdatt, 4865 people from different wards migrated to India for work but the population of Indian migrants to Bhimdatt Municipality was not exactly known. For this, survey was carried out for identifying the Indian labour migrants in Bhimdatt Municipality (Mahendranagar). According to nature of jobs (Agriculture, Construction, Manufacture and Service sectors), it is enumerated that 924 Indian labours working in Mahendranagar (Nepal) as a labourer. For quantitative study, a total of 370 samples were used for Nepali labour-migrants to India and 280 for Indian labour-migrants to Nepal. The sample size was determined as follows (Yamane formula):

$$\text{Sample size (n)} = N / [1 + N(e)^2],$$

Where, N= total labour migrants, e=level of precision (5%)

Samples in each stratum of classification of their working nature i. e. construction, manufacture, service and agriculture sectors were drawn randomly. A set of questionnaires regarding the understanding migration and selecting destination process. For this, it was used for data collection through face to face- interview. Data have been analyzed using descriptive statistics for both groups of migrants and compared them using a t-test and chi-square test. The qualitative method included field observation and key informant interviews (KIIs) with individuals who had long experience and knowledge of Nepal-India migration. KIIs are selected as purposive sampling technique.

## Result and Discussion

In general, majorities of migrants choose their destination on the basis of their network. Migration process includes in this research basically concern to migrants' destinations, time of migration, migration decision, frequency of migration and selection of destination. It then goes depth into the analysis of including the selection of destination and mode of migration.

### *Origin and Destinations of Migrants*

The migration between Nepal and India is running since long. Nepali migrants choose different cities of India for working destination and Indians choose mostly the nearer distance. Another important thing is that there are some common cities in India (including Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) which seem to be both origin and destination as well. Moreover, the distance between the origins determines the volume of migration between place of origin and destination i.e., higher the distance, lower the volume of migration and vice versa (Revenstein, 1885).

Graphically, the movement of migrants is shown in the map below (Figure 1). This map shows that Nepali labour migrants from Bhimdatt Municipality move to different states of India, i.e., Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himanchal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Haryana, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab. Likewise, Indian labour

migrants from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal migrated to Bhimdatt Municipality for work.

*Table 1: Distribution of Labour Migrants by Origin and Destination States in India*

Origin and destination states of migrants in India	Nepali labour migrants to India (Destination)		Indian labour migrants to Nepal (Origin)	
	Number (N)	Percent (%)	Number(N)	Percent (%)
Uttar Pradesh	9	2.3	227	81.1
Uttarakhand	27	7.2	38	13.6
West Bengal	-	-	9	3.2
Bihar	-	-	6	2.1
Delhi	111	30.0	-	-
Karnataka	59	16.0	-	-
Punjab	42	11.4	-	-
Maharashtra	39	10.6	-	-
Haryana	24	6.5	-	-
Gujarat	21	5.7	-	-
Himanchal Pradesh	17	4.6	-	-
Goa	12	3.2	-	-
Tamil Nadu	6	1.6	-	-
Madhya Pradesh	1	0.3	-	-
Andhra Pradesh	1	0.3	-	-
Rajasthan	1	0.3	-	-
Total	370	100	280	100

*(Note: Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Bihar are the states of India having both origin and destination for this study)*

From Figure 3, it is evident that about 81.1 percent from Uttar Pradesh, 13.6 percent from Uttarakhand, 3.2 percent from West Bengal, and 2.1 percent from Bihar labours migrated to Bhimdatt Municipality.

The data shows that about 30 percent of people from Bhimdatt Municipality migrate to the capital city Delhi. Similarly, 16 percent to Karnataka, 11.4 percent to Punjab, 10.6 percent to Maharashtra, 7.2 percent to Uttarakhand, 6 percent to Haryana, and others move to Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan. This finding challenges Revenstein's theory of migration in which the distance between the origins determines the volume of migration between the place of origin and destination i.e., higher the distance, the lower the volume of migration and vice versa (Revenstein, 1885). Moreover, another important thing is that there are some common cities in India (including Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) that seem to be both origin (Indian labour migrants to Nepal) and destination (Nepali labour migrants to India) as well.



Figure 1: Locations of destination of Nepali labour migrants to India from the study area; Source: [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com) (2020)

The Nepali labour migrants from Bhimdatt Municipality move to different big cities in India. Likewise, Indian labour migrants from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal migrated to Bhimdatt Municipality for work. The majority of people from Uttar Pradesh (India) migrate to Bhimdatt Municipality (Nepal) for work. On the other hand, the larger size of the population from Bhimdatt Municipality moves to Delhi for searching work. Higher the rate of migration from Uttar Pradesh to Nepal reflects a correlation with the nearby distance, open-Nepal border, and chances of employment in all kinds of seasons in Nepal. Likewise, the different sizes of the population from Bhimdatt Municipality migrate to other different cities of India as destinations. The study shows that about 30 percent of people from Bhimdatt Municipality migrate to the capital city New Delhi. Probably, it is due to the higher chances of job availability which is also accepted by thieme (2006).

Basyal (2014) has also carried out a study about the main destinations of Nepali labour migrants in India are Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat, Bangalore, Kerala, Pune, Ludhiana, Amritsar, and the hill towns of Almora, Nainital, Shimla and Pithoragarh whereas Seddon and Gurung (2001) mentioned that people from central Nepal moved to Indian cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Varanasi, Agra, Lucknow, Kanpur, Chennai, and Bangalore. Likewise, Bhagat and Keshari (2010) showed that seasonal migration from Nepal to India is highest in Uttar Pradesh (before the restructuring of Uttar Pradesh in the birth of Uttarakhand) followed by Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar.



Figure 2: Locations of origion of Indian labour migrants to Nepal from India; Source: [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com) (2020)

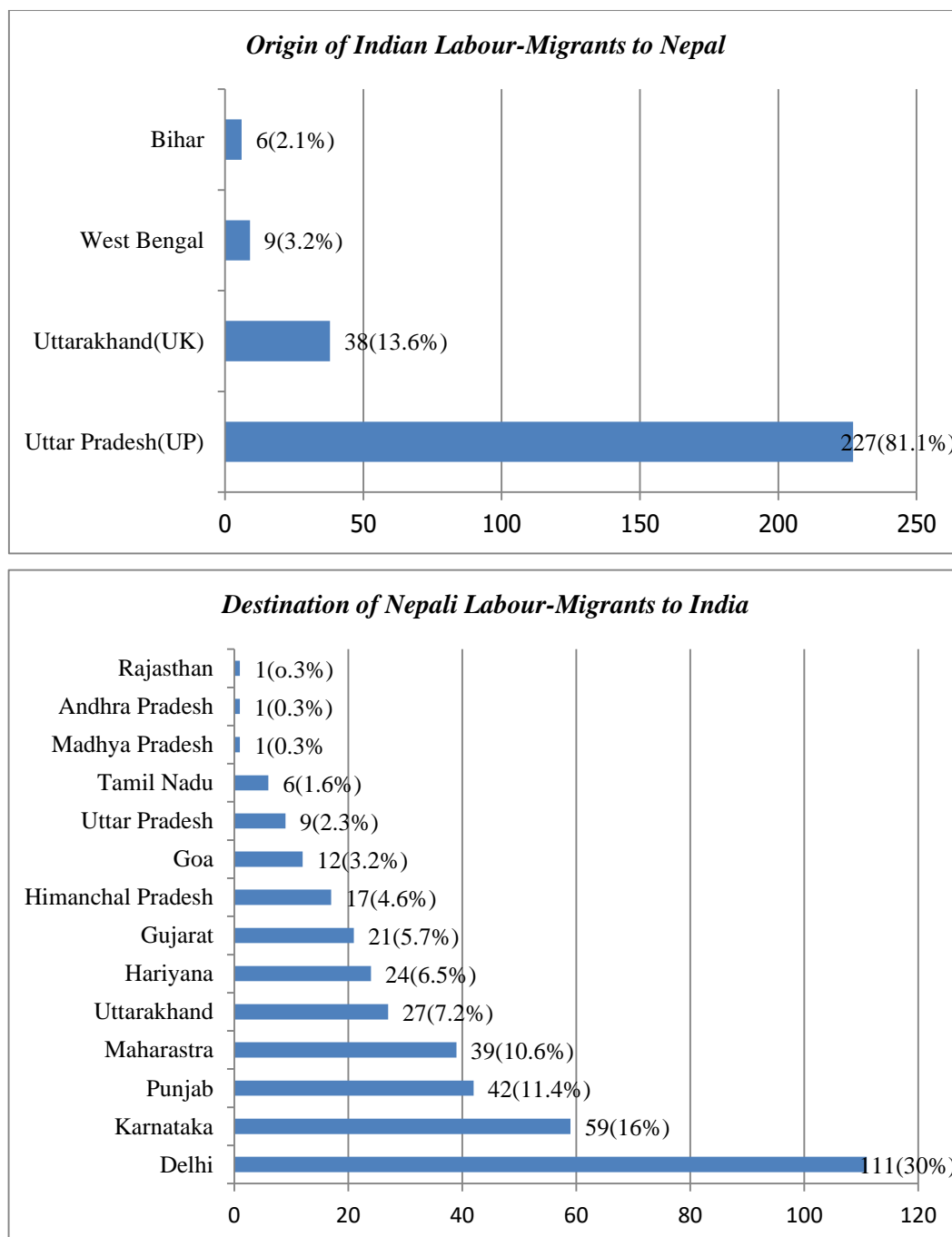


Figure 3: Distribution of Indian labour migrants to Bhimdatt Municipality by origin and Nepali migrants to India by destination

### Time of Migration

Seasonality has different issues coupled with not merely a climatic or environmental issue of adaptation and suitability. Rather, it is also associated with different kinds of socio-cultural, economic, and political causes. In this particular study, the timing of migration seems to be more regular (i.e., 64.1%) in both for the Nepali and Indian labour migrants. Timing and seasonality are important dimensions of migration. In the international discourse of migration, various scholars empirically show that seasonality has dual characteristics being a pull factor as well as a push factor in the migration process (Crawford, & Campbell, 2012). According to Brusle (2008), the availability of work, networks, and distance are the factors to influence the choice of a destination made by migrants. In discussion with

migrants, they mostly go to their destination after harvesting their agricultural works in origin however they continue their work at their destination.

*Table 2: Distribution of Labour Migrants by Time of Migration*

Time to migration towards destination	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal		Both groups	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
After harvesting agriculture	66	17.8	-	-	66	10.2
During vacation	32	8.7	-	-	32	4.9
At the time of being unemployed	67	18.1	65	23.2	132	20.3
Continuity of work since migrated	202	54.6	215	76.8	417	64.1
No fixed	3	0.8	-	-	3	0.5
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0	650	100.0

(Note: No fixed means there is not fixed time for migration. They can migrate at any time; it is depended on migrants' choice and their situations)

Seasonality has different issues coupled with not merely a climatic or environmental issue of adaptation and suitability. Comparatively, the Indian labour migrants to Nepal have more inclination for regular work which might be due to the frequent availability of jobs at the destinations, i.e., Bhimdatt Municipality. Migrations in agriculture season and during vacation are also seen for the Nepali labour migrants to India, while it is not reflected for the Indian labour migrants. Migration behaviour while the time of being unemployed seems to be second most followed both by the Nepali and Indian labour migrants. Around one-fifth of the total labour, migrants are following this type of migratory move. It means they could have multiple livelihood strategies as well irrespective of what they would have done in their destinations. In the personal interview with key interview informants, it is evident that Nepali migrants have unplanned migration in compare to Indian labour migrants. According to key informant interview, Bharmal Sunar (84 years), "Nepali labour migrants move to India in search of job without any plan beforehand. Similarly, they remain unplanned regarding the time they return to their origin. However, in case of Indian labour migrants, most of them seem planned about their journey to the origin and destination."

### ***Reasons for Selecting the Particular Destinations***

India is the preferred destination for western mountain/hills migrants of Nepal but the choices of migration vary with the forms of social exclusion and inclusion as represented by the socio-economic status of the households. In the same prospect, Czaika and Reinprecht (2022) explained that of 9 dimensions (Demographic, Economic, Environmental, Human Development, Individual, Politico-Institutional, Security, Socio-cultural and Supranational) and 24 different driving factors are the causes of labour migration however they agreed that socio-cultural dimension are still dominant which statement is exactly matched with cross-border labour migration between Nepal and India too.

Table 3 describes some interesting facts that are the sources of information for migration. The main source of information seems to be generated with relatives and friends (50.9%) for both migrants. It is followed by the sources of information related to the contractor and employer (25.4%), though it seems more significant to the Indian labour migrants as compared to the Nepali labour migrants. The family-related source of information holds also an important role in migration as evidenced by the Nepali labour migrants to India (33.8%), and less by the Indian labour migrants to Nepal (10.4%).

Moreover, the reason for choosing a destination due to parents/social relationship seems to be more important for Nepali a labour migrant (56.5%), which does not stand anymore with the case of the Indian labour migrants. The table shows more than half (i.e., 53.9%) of the total Indian labour migrants took a migratory move to Nepal because of easy availability/easy entry exit. To determine the relationship between the source of information and country of origin, the Pearson Chi-square test was carried out where the p-value was found less than its level of significance (0.01) which indicates that

there is a statistical association between these two variables. Likewise, it was also seen that the relationship between the reason for choosing a particular destination and their country of origin. India is the preferred destination for western mountain/hills migrants of Nepal but the choices of migration vary with the forms of social exclusion and inclusion as represented by the socio-economic status of the households. The choice of rich people seems to migrate to third countries (other than India) as their destination but the choice of poor migrant families is to take migration to India in most cases. It is primarily due to family obligations as well as due to a large number of expenses to go to foreign employment outside India. At the same time, social networks play a vital role in migration and the choice of destination too (Gurung, 2012).

Table 3: Distribution of Labour Migrants by source of information and reason for selecting the destination

Source of Information	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal		Both groups	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Relatives/friends	204	55.1	127	45.3	331	50.9
Family	125	33.8	29	10.4	154	23.7
Contractor/employer	41	11.1	124	44.3	165	25.4
Pearson Chi-Square Test	Value		Df		Sig.	
	109.139		2		0.000	
Reason for Choosing Destination						
Easy availability/Entry-exit	51	13.8	151	53.9	202	31.1
Parents/Social relationship	209	56.5	-	-	209	32.1
Higher wage rate	110	29.7	129	46.1	239	36.8
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0	650	100.0
Pearson Chi-Square Test	Value		Df		Sig.	
	252.393		2		0.000	

(Note: Social relationship means their kinship, friendship, family relation and other contact)

Similarly, Lamichhane (2018) described that social networks reduce the migration cost in destination and it affects the migration decision. He further explained that the vulnerability of jobs due to slower economic growth in comparison with the increasing labour force entering the labour market and the differences in wages/income between Nepal and other labour-welcoming countries are key factors that could affect the migration decision. Similarly, Bhardwaj (2010) described the open border between Nepal and India as a viable bond of a mutual relationship between the two societies and it is a matter of trust between the two governments. In terms of migration, the open border system has created a kind of homogeneity of emotions, social and cultural bonding, economic interdependence, and survival of people living with multiple livelihood strategies. The main source of information seems to be generated with relatives and friends (50.9%) for both migrants. It might be due to the nature of work at the destinations as most of the Indian labour migrants work in industries while the Nepali labour migrants in India work in industries as well as individual houses and other single businesses.

According to Thieme (2006), the migration between Nepal and India is due to the strong bonding of social capital though there is limited access to jobs, shelter, and physical infrastructure. They can find jobs, shelter, loans, and other information through their social networks. Family and kinship are the most important coping mechanism. However, the social networks among migrants are not the same for everyone. Likewise, Subedi (1991) further described that the extension of the Indian railway network up to the border of Nepal raised migration between both countries. He further stated that a large number of Nepalis and Indians are Hindus and have common festivals and faiths, as well as the majority people of the Tarai, are similar in their physical appearance, language, and social behaviours to the Indian people including kinship after marriage in cross border districts. In support of this study, K.C. (1998) and Basyal (2020) concluded that immigration from Nepal to India has been influenced by employment in unskilled jobs, income, and unrestricted rules of entry and exit. Indian immigration to Nepal is influenced by the differential opportunity for employment, demand for skilled and semi-skilled



manpower, small distance, low cost of transportation, unrestricted entry and exit, and closer affinity in religion, culture, language, and family ties. In addition, Basyal (2020) added that social networks support getting jobs, shelter, loans, and saving money. According to him, Nepali migrants in Delhi are working for survival rather than higher income.

This study shows the causes of choosing a destination seem not to be significantly different. However, the cause of the higher wage rate seems to be more followed in aggregate but mostly followed by Indian labour migrants (46.1%) as compared to the Nepali labour migrants (29.7%). It reflects that Indian labour migrants to Nepal are economically deterministic and they could take decisions as per the economic cost-benefit analysis, including the income, savings, and wages they would get. Moreover, the cause of choosing a destination due to ancestors, parents and social relationship seems to be more important for Nepali labour migrants (56.5%), which do not stand anymore with the case of the Indian labour migrants. This simply implies that Nepali labour migrants took migration decisions as per the cultural and social schooling where family and social relations are more important. So, they are less economically deterministic, rather are culturally motivated.

### ***Frequency of Labour Migrants Returning at Origin***

Labour migration usually doesn't happen for permanent shifting of residence or locality. The majority (51.9%) of Nepali labour migrants used to return to their origin once a year while 31.9 percent return within 6 months, 6.8 percent during festivals or as per need. But, 27.5 percent of Indian labour migrants returned to their origin monthly; it's because of the closer distance. They mostly stayed their home for at least a day and then returned to their destination. Only 7.5 percent of Indian labour migrants returned within the year while 21.4 percent returned as and when needed. It is analyzed that the distance for migration plays a vital role in the frequency of migrants returning to their origin. Migrants having shorter distances usually return to their origin monthly while long-distance migrants return annually. In the case of Indian labour migrants who work in bricklayers' industries usually return to India during monsoon season (the brick factories remain closed). During the season, they return to India with family and get engaged in picking apples at Shimla.

### ***History of Migration (Generation)***

Migration to India has been one of the key livelihood strategies amongst marginal households in the middle hills of western and far-western Nepal (Seddon et al., 2001; Thieme, 2006). From Table 8, it is clear that 40.3 percent of Nepali labour migrants migrated to India from their generation, 48.1 percent migrated since their father's generation and the rest 11.6 percent migrated since their grandfather. Similarly, in the case of Indian labour migrants, 65.7 percent migrated from their generation (first generation) and the rest 34.3 percent migrated from their fathers' generation.

*Table 4: Distribution of Labour Migrants by frequency of returning at origin*

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

*[Note: During festivals/as per need means migrants return during the major festivals (Bisu parb, Goura, Dashain, Tihar, Holy in case of Nepali labour migrants while Indian return as per their festival celebration)]*

*Table 5: Distribution of Migrant history (generation) of respondents*

Generation of migration	Nepali labour migrants to India		Indian labour migrants to Nepal		Both groups	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
From current generation	149	40.3	184	65.7	333	51.2
From the time of father	178	48.1	96	34.3	274	42.2
From the time of grandfather	43	11.6	-	-	43	6.6
Total	370	100.0	280	100.0	650	100.0
Migration History (Districts of Migrants' Ancestors)						
Achham	48	13.0				
Baitadi	112	30.3				
Bajhang	34	9.2				
Bajura	38	10.3				
Dadeldhura	53	14.3				
Darchula	56	15.1				
Doti	4	1.1				
Kanchanpur	23	6.2				
Pyuthan	2	0.5				

*(Note: Generation shows their experiences and tradition of migration)*

From table 5, it is clear that the majority of the migrants (30%) migrants having step origin at Baitadi and others are (15% Darchula, 15 % Dadeldhura, 13 % Achham, 10% Bajura, and 9 % Bajhang). It is due to the larger population in Bhimdatt Municipality migrating from the Baitadi district than other hilly districts. Migration to India has been one of the key livelihood strategies amongst marginal households in the middle hills of western and far-western Nepal (Seddon et al., 2001; Thieme, 2006). Thieme (2006) carried out a study on social networks and migration of far-western labour migration in Delhi. His study contributes to an understanding of the process of migration and its contribution to the livelihoods of people from rural areas in Nepal. Similarly, Thapa and Yadav (2015) suggested that the push factors in the hill have been much more influential than the pull factors of the plains in determining migratory trends and patterns.

Bhimdatt Municipality is the common location for migrants (the first step from hilly regions) and from there they further migrate to India for work as seasonal migrants. In this context, Bir Ram SK (Head teacher of local school) has got different experiences regarding the migration to India is very similar to their ancestors. He mentioned that the groups of people living in terai with the name of the village at origin like Bajhangi Tole, Bajureli Tole etc. They prefer to start their journey in a group then going alone due to sense of security and wishing to get job opportunities with the knowledge and experiences of their ancestors. Some of them take their children and rests of migrants have got the family members or relatives at home to care the children. Based on the above-mentioned studies, the volume of migration towards India from hill areas of Sudurpaschim Province is high. Most of the migrants from Bhimdatt Municipality belong to different hill districts of the province i.e. first the family migrated to the Tarai area from hill stations and then again migrated to Indian cities as per their generation followed earlier. Thieme et al. (2005) describe that migration has been practiced for generations and migration networks have been developed. This study shows that most of the households belonging to the hilly region saw higher migration than the ethnic residents of the Kanchanpur district saw lower migration to India. Labour migration from Nepal to India continues for generations.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

The volume of migration towards India from hilly areas of Sudurpaschim Province is higher. The process of migration takes place first from different hilly regions to the Terai region (Bhimdatt

Municipality), and then some of them migrate to India afterward following the trend of their earlier generations. Nepali labour migrants, in general, choose a longer distance for migration by following their network chain in big cities in India while Indian labour migrants prefer to choose their destination nearby their border areas. Nepali labour migrants choose destinations based on their relationships and networks rather than analyzing economic benefits. Indian migrants to Nepal are economically deterministic, and they could decide as per the economic cost-benefit analysis, including the income, savings, and wages they would get. Reflecting on the findings, this study firstly supports the government to develop strategic plans and policies for achieving the needs of labour market. Secondly, it contributes to theories of migration with specific reference to less developed countries. The result of the study has added new contribution to the migration theories specifically considering the case of Nepa and India

## Acknowledgement

This research is based on my PhD study enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University (TU) Nepal. I would like to express my deep sense of acknowledgment and heartfelt thanks to University Grant Commission (UGC) Nepal for providing scholarship on this research. Similarly, I am equally indebted towards my supervisor Prof. Dr. Govind Subedi and other experts for their continuous supports and guidance.

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