



Restructuring Nepalese Societies through Residential Relocation and Its Social Effects

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the voluntary relocation of residents of Nepalese society and its effects on social relationships, which unfolds the restructuring and transforming of the old residential structure of Nepalese society. Some scholars attribute the individual factors to the residential relocation and exemplify the life-cycle changes of household heads or household composition, such as the age, employment, or marital status of the household head and the number of children (Rossi, 1955). They believe that the increase of marriage rate and fertility rate are determinative conditions for the residential relocation and rapid expansion of suburban areas. Besides these arguments, many scholars have embraced various facets of social change with residential relocation and find that most residents move to significantly higher-income and less racially segregated suburban neighborhoods with access to better infrastructure, services, and amenities (Deluca et al., 2005; Diewald and Mayer, 2009). Suburban growth is propelled by transportation and technology development, such as mass-produced automobiles and highways. It is an interesting social phenomenon in Nepal that the residents from hilly and remote areas are relocating downward and close to market areas. Drawing on the fieldwork in Lele Valley, Lalitpur District – an emerging suburban area – this paper examines how people prefer to relocate their residences near to market and transport facilities, creating a new social relationship. It is found that they relocate their residents because of income sent from their family members who are in foreign employment or they sell their land. They introduce a new type of nexus and relationship with new neighbors who are not among their kinship and start bonding on every occasion.

Keywords: residence, relocation, suburban, social relationship, livelihood

INTRODUCTION

The structure of Nepali society is undergoing rapid and continual transformation. These changes are multifaceted, encompassing shifts in demographics and alterations in infrastructure. Notably, the development of urban and semi-urban areas stands out as a

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prominent factor in this evolving landscape. Equally significant, yet often overlooked in sociological discourse, are the structural changes occurring in rural regions, particularly in terms of housing. This study aims to address this underexplored aspect by delving into the causes and social consequences of these structural changes in rural Nepal, with a specific focus on residential relocation.

Residential relocation is a distinct concept, diverging from traditional notions of migration. Migration typically implies leaving one's original place of residence for a different location, whether within the same country or abroad (Castle & Miller, 2013). In contrast, residential relocation entails a change of residence within a relatively short distance. Hence, the term 'residential relocation' is employed to denote the shift in an individual's primary place of residence, regardless of the proximity between the old and new addresses (Coulter & Scott, 2014). While this terminology may not be widely recognized, it serves a valuable purpose in distinguishing this phenomenon from other forms of movement.

In existing literature, the phrase 'residential relocation' is often used to describe changes of address occurring within the same local area or region. 'Migration,' on the other hand, predominantly refers to inter-regional changes of residence, occasionally extending to movements across national borders. Meanwhile, 'mobility' encompasses various forms of residential changes, including recurrent movements between places of work and residence. None of these alternative terms fully encapsulates the social phenomenon explored in the subsequent chapters of this study.

Much of the existing research in this field focuses on urban structures and migration, leaving a notable gap in our understanding of residential relocation, which primarily involves short-distance housing displacement. As such, this study seeks to address this gap by shedding light on the often-overlooked aspect of structural changes in rural areas, particularly in the context of housing and residential relocation.

Sociologists have traditionally concentrated their attention on migration when examining residential relocation. Nevertheless, the act of relocating one's residence offers valuable insights into the diversification of income and consumption patterns. Additionally, it plays a pivotal role in understanding the transformation of social relationships. Therefore, my research inquiry revolves around the processes of residential relocation within the study area and the subsequent impact it has on social relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted through field research in Lele village, situated within Godawari Municipality, ward number 5, Lalitpur. Field research is a qualitative research approach that entails the observation and assessment of human interactions within their natural environments, encompassing individuals, communities, and groups (Van Maanen, 1988). Primary data was collected from the field using a simple random sampling technique. To achieve this, Lele village's new residences were divided into five distinct strata, from which five residences were selected in each stratum. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to the household heads in these selected residences. Subsequently, the collected data was listed, coded, and categorized to elucidate its relevance to the research objectives.

The study employed an explanatory data analysis process, presenting findings through tables and narratives provided by the respondents.

Previous Studies on Relocation of Residence

Homes hold a significant place in individuals' lives, serving as the backdrop for a multitude of essential activities and the fulfillment of basic needs. They provide comfort, shelter, privacy, and a canvas for self-expression, stimulation, and recreation. Within the confines of their homes, individuals experience the spectrum of human emotions, from love to hate, engage in work and relaxation, and establish their personal identities. Homes also function as status symbols, differentiating one individual from another (Lersch, 2012, p. 1).

Beyond the home, individuals venture into their neighborhoods, engaging in activities like leisurely strolls, neighborly conversations, medical appointments, and shopping. When it comes to employment, workers typically commute to workplaces within their region, and when seeking new job opportunities, they often begin their search in the local labor market. Consequently, the places where individuals reside—their homes, neighborhoods, and regions—play a pivotal role in determining their quality of life and serve as a noteworthy dimension of social stratification (DaVanzo, 1981, p. 90).

The significance of where individuals reside cannot be overstated (Buck, 2000a; Tickamyer, 2000; Groh-Samberg, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to investigate how individuals come to live in specific locations at various life stages and under what circumstances relocations alter the quality of these locations throughout their life courses. People undergo residential relocations at different points in their lives, and these moves are influenced by various factors, including their employment situations (Diewald and Mayer, 2009, p. 6). Residential relocation involves individuals adapting their living arrangements to meet the evolving requirements and desires stemming from shifts in their life trajectories and careers.

Residential relocations, however, do not adhere to a uniform pattern or regularity. Individuals make decisions to relocate based on significant life events, stages, and labor market opportunities. It is attributed to the individual factors of the residential relocation and exemplifies the life-cycle changes of household heads or household composition, such as the age, employment, or marital status of the household head and the number of children (Rossi, 1955, p. 24). While it is common for individuals to leave their parental homes, most people relocate more than once during their lives. For example, in Germany, approximately 65 percent of the population aged 15 and above have relocated at least twice, with about 18 percent moving more than four times. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, roughly 71 percent of those aged 15 and over have moved at least twice, and 30 percent have relocated more than four times (Bonin et al., 2008, p. 36).

Interestingly, there is limited knowledge about how these relocations impact the quality of individuals' residential locations. It is often assumed that relocations are positive events that enhance individuals' lives overall (Lu, 1998). For instance, the popular "housing ladder" model presupposes that households improve the quality of their housing with each relocation, resulting in a continuous upward trajectory in terms of price, size, and quality of dwellings. Residential relocation indicates that most residents move to significantly

higher-income and less racially segregated suburban neighborhoods with access to better infrastructure, services, and amenities (Deluca et al., 2005; Diewald and Mayer, 2009).

Moreover, in modern and post-industrial societies, geographic mobility is commonly associated with upward social mobility and societal progress, representing one of the core tenets of modernity (Hochstadt, 1999, p. 20). However, the belief in the inherent positivity of residential relocations tends to overlook the considerable variation in outcomes. While some individuals experience the benefits promised by mobility, others may encounter negative changes in certain aspects of their lives, and some may remain largely unaffected by relocations.

For instance, research by Clark, Deurloo, and Dieleman (2006, p. 335) reveals that only a quarter of movers experience simultaneous improvements in the economic status of their neighborhoods and housing quality. Some may secure better job opportunities following a move, but the labor market outcomes of relocations can greatly differ among individuals (Jacobsen and Levin, 2000). This variation underscores that relocations are contingent events within the life course, with outcomes that can range from largely positive to negative. Understanding the conditions that explain this variability in relocation outcomes forms the research puzzle at the heart of this work.

Significance of Residential Relocation Study

A residence serves as the primary dwelling where individuals and their families live and sustain their livelihoods. When a household relocates from its original location, it can have a significant impact on the overall status and well-being of that household. Notably, the relationships with neighbors undergo substantial changes as a result of residential relocation. The pattern of residence holds structural significance within a specific society, encompassing its economic activities and social connections. Hence, the study of residential relocation is a crucial area of interest in the field of sociology.

Rural areas are home to a vast majority of impoverished individuals, with approximately one-third of the rural population living in poverty (World Bank, 2015). Research has demonstrated a direct correlation between relocation and poverty reduction. Alterations in income sources exert a significant influence on migration patterns within rural regions. Several influential models posit that people choose to move in pursuit of maximizing their expected incomes (Harris and Todaro, 1970; Sjaastad, 1964). Recent studies have consistently shown that migration contributes to improved economic well-being for individuals in sub-Saharan Africa, effectively establishing migration as a viable “pathway out of poverty.”

Irrespective of the destination, migrants are more inclined to rely on off-farm and non-farm income sources, indicating that even within rural areas, migration leads to a shift away from agriculture, which is likely the primary mechanism through which migrants experience economic benefits. Consequently, intra-rural migration deserves heightened attention in discussions surrounding rural development and structural transformation. Despite the predominant focus on rural-to-urban migration, it is essential to recognize that intra-rural migration is prevalent in many developing countries (Bilsborrow, 1998; Lucas, 2015).

In sub-Saharan Africa, it is acknowledged as the most common form of movement, surpassing rural-to-urban, urban-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and rural-to-rural migrations. This trend has been observed in various contexts, including Botswana in the 1980s, Ghana in the 1990s, Burkina Faso in the early 2000s, and more recently in South Africa, where two-thirds of all movements from rural households led to another rural destination (Wineman & Jayne, 2017). In the Kagera region of northwestern Tanzania, nearly half of the population relocated from their initial villages over a 10-year period, with 74% of rural migrants settling in other rural areas. Consequently, residential relocation is a global phenomenon that has been overlooked in the context of Nepal, despite its potential to signify significant social structural transformations within the country.

Internal Migration and Residential Relocation in Nepal

Migration is typically defined as a geographic process involving a change in one's usual place of residence. It represents a significant demographic factor that can bring about alterations in population size, composition, and distribution. Census data reveals that in recent years, particularly after 1991, there has been a substantial and accelerated increase in the volume of internal migration.

In Nepal, rural-to-rural migration stands out as the dominant migration stream, surpassing all others, and the majority of migrants are individuals who have chosen longer-term migration (KC, 2020). Within the context of in-country migration in Nepal, certain patterns emerge. It is evident that this type of migration exhibits selectivity by age and gender, with a preference for younger individuals and females. Male migration is primarily driven by economic motives, whereas female migration is predominantly associated with marriage. On average, each year sees four individuals per 1000 of the population migrating across regional boundaries, with an additional six persons crossing district boundaries. A significant proportion of migrants originating from various districts tend to gravitate towards areas such as Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Chitwan, Sunsari, Morang, and Rupandehi. Notably, Kathmandu district emerges as the most common destination for migrants from all districts, characterized by high out-migration rates.

Over time, the hilly regions of Nepal continue to serve as the primary areas of origin for internal migrants, resulting in a net population loss from these regions. A substantial number of districts, particularly those situated in the mountainous and hilly terrain, experience a population decline, with some districts in the eastern and western hills losing up to half of their population. Conversely, the Terai plains and the Kathmandu Valley consistently attract the highest number of internal migrants and experience a net population gain. It is evident that the majority of migration to the Terai region occurs from the adjacent hill regions.

According to the 2021 census, 68 percent of the total population (29,164,578) still reside in their usual places of former residence (NSO, 2021, p. 3). However, 32 percent of the population is identified as having migrated. Within this group, 10.7 percent have relocated to another municipality, 18.2 percent to another district, and 3.1 percent from their previous residence to abroad. The reasons for current migration are varied, with marriage accounting for 38.2 percent, work or employment at 15.2 percent, trade or business at 2.8 percent,

education or training at 7.8 percent, dependent family members at 19.5 percent, natural disasters at 0.7 percent, agriculture at 3.9 percent, returnees at 4.1 percent, and other reasons at 6.6 percent. Importantly, it is worth noting that the National Statistics Office (NSO) has not collected data on migration within the same municipality. Consequently, the phenomenon of residential relocation, as discussed in this article, remains an area in need of in-depth study and examination.

Residential Relocation in Lele Village

The Lele village is located in Ward No. 5 in the Godawari Municipality. Positioned just 15 kilometers to the east of Lalitpur Metropolitan City’s Lagankhel area, Lele Valley is home to a diverse population, including Newar, Tamang, Pahari, and Chhetri ethnic groups. The inhabitants of this area primarily engage in agricultural activities, with a significant number also holding jobs in both the public and private sectors outside the village. For my research, I surveyed 25 households in Lele Valley.

Differences in land ownership and income among the surveyed individuals have a direct impact on their motivation to consider relocation. These variations in landownership and the type of occupation pursued play a significant role in determining their income levels. The level of income that individuals earn is a key factor in defining their social standing, and it varies across different socioeconomic classes. The more affluent segment tends to enjoy higher incomes, while those in the less privileged classes typically have lower earnings. The economic status of a household is indicative of its available resources and significantly shapes its overall quality of life. This income disparity is primarily attributed to factors such as educational attainment, occupational skills, social status, and exclusivity (Woodtke, 2016, p. 19). Initially, I addressed the income status of the participants as a primary consideration in their decision-making process regarding relocation.

Table 1

Income Sources of relocation of residence

Income sources	Respondents	Percentage	“Less Than” Cumulative percentage	“Or More” Cumulative Percentage
Land sold	7	28	28	100
Government job	8	32	60	72
Foreign employment	6	24	84	40
Private jobs	2	8	92	16
Business	2	8	100	8
Total	25	100	-	-

Among the five income source categories, the majority of individuals earned income through land sales, government employment, and foreign employment. However, income from jobs

alone was insufficient for them to consider relocating their residence. In such cases, they resorted to a combination of resources, which included selling land and earning income from jobs or foreign employment. Once they had accumulated enough income to facilitate relocation, their preference was to move to areas near well-connected roads in flat regions, minimizing the need to walk even short distances. Kamal Karki, one of the respondents, said:

The residence was quite old, made up of stone and mud, and the living space was inadequate. When it was originally constructed near the market, it was extremely convenient, as we didn't have to walk far to purchase even basic items like salt. Nevertheless, the desire for improved living conditions and the thought of residing in a better house started to occupy our minds. Despite my initial reluctance to leave the area, we began to contemplate what it would be like to dwell in a modern home. As more and more people in the community began building new houses, this collective decision ultimately led us to embark on the journey of constructing a new residence as well.

The study reveals that many residents have diversified their income sources beyond farming, with a predominant trend of using off-farm income. Those who were residing on the upper level of the hillside relocated to plain areas, occupying fields. Forty percent of them have ages, bought land to build new houses, and others built houses on their own land, which is in the plain area and near the roadside. A significant majority of the houses have been constructed using reinforced concrete (RCC) technology. These residences typically consist of three stories and are equipped with contemporary furnishings. As a result, there has been a transformation in the overall societal landscape, turning rural areas into semi-urban settings. The occupation they followed has also changed slightly.

After relocating residence, it impacts the occupation and social relationships of people. In the previous place, they had the traditional occupation of agriculture. They also reared some goats and cows. It is interesting to find whether they continue their occupation.

Table 2

Continuation of traditional occupation

Income sources	Respondents	Percentage	"Less Than" Cumulative percentage	"Or More" Cumulative Percentage
Agriculture	18	72	72	100
Rearing goats and cows	2	8	80	28
Not doing any thing	5	20	100	20
Total	25	100	-	-

Those who undertook the relocation have upheld their traditional income streams, chiefly centered on agriculture. Both the older and newly constructed houses serve the dual purpose of farming management and storing agricultural produce. However, there has been

a noticeable decline in the rearing of goats and cows due to the challenges associated with housing these animals in the modern-style new houses. Nevertheless, they’ve also diversified their livelihood sources. They’ve accumulated savings from land sales, secured government positions, and engaged in overseas employment. In total, these supplementary sources account for over 80% of their income. This indicates that while they haven’t completely abandoned their traditional occupations, these pursuits are no longer as financially lucrative for them. Raghunath Thapa said:

I had a desire to persist with my agricultural pursuits; however, this has proven to be challenging. My time is occupied by work outside the village, leaving me with little opportunity to tend to the fields. Additionally, the cost of labor has become quite steep, and I find myself growing older, making the physical demands of farming more difficult. Thankfully, I receive a pension that helps cover my expenses. Furthermore, my son has a job in the army, and as a result, I no longer raise any goats or cows.

Raghunath Thapa’s statement delineates that people could not continue their traditional occupation. Except for occupation, they also have some changes in relation with relatives.

Table 3
Relationship with old relatives

Types of meeting	Respondents	Percentage	"Less Than"	"Or More"
			Cumulative percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Occasional	8	32	32	100
Seldom	6	24	46	68
Never meet	2	8	54	44
Mostly	9	36	100	36
Total	25	100	-	-

The relocated residences are often half kilometer distance from their original residence. The social bond among them is also loosening as they choose new residence though they live nearby the old localities. I asked them how many time in a week visit their old house and old relatives. The distance is not so far, so mostly more than 35 percentages meet their relatives regularly. However, less than 35 percentages of respondents meet their relatives occasionally on festivals and family gathering only. However, the gathering is shorter than previous time. It shows that their social relationship is loosely bonded with their relatives. Jhuma Thapa, one of my respondents said that it is difficult to go up every day and only meet relatives in interval of time such as festivals and special family occasions. But, they are making strong bond with the new neighbours.

Table 4*Relationship with new neighbours*

Relationships	Respondents	Percentage	"Less Than" Cumulative percentage	"Or More" Cumulative Percentage
More strong	11	44	44	100
strong	9	36	80	56
weak	3	12	92	20
More weak	2	8	100	8
Total	25	100	-	-

Upon moving to a different location, individuals have forged relationships with their freshly acquainted neighbors, many of whom they had already formed strong bonds with while residing in their previous town. Nevertheless, their relocation has distanced them from their extended family members. Consequently, they have developed deeper connections with their new neighbors, with some remarking that these relationships are even more robust. They engage in activities such as gathering for tea at nearby teashops and extending invitations to various festivals and family gatherings, which encompass roughly 80 percent of their social interactions. However, it's worth noting that the new community is characterized by a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds, which poses challenges when it comes to building connections. As a result, it has been observed that the sense of unity among residents in the new area is not as strong as it was in their previous locale. Bachchu Mahat admits:

Upon my arrival in a new settlement, I am introduced to a set of fresh neighbors, many of whom belong to the Newar community. I share a strong and cordial rapport with them, and they affectionately address me as gathering. They take care to prepare meals that respect our respective castes, and we regularly gather for tea in both the morning and evening. In times of illness or when any challenges arise, we willingly lend each other a helping hand, and we often sit together in unity. Consequently, I no longer feel like a newcomer in this community.

The process of relocating one's residence also has an influence on people's consumption patterns. People's consumption habits are influenced by factors such as their social standing and their proximity to markets (Weber, 1947; Fisher, 1987). When individuals move to a new residential area, it often leads to a shift in their social status, and they find themselves closer to local markets. As a result, their reliance on agricultural production tends to diminish while their dependence on market-based goods and services increases.

Table 5

Consumption Pattern in new Location

Consumption	Respondents	Percentage	"Less Than" Cumulative percentage	"Or More" Cumulative Percentage
Total products from field	4	16	16	100
Mixed type	14	56	72	84
Fully depend on market	7	28	100	28
Total	25	100	-	-

When people move to a new location, their consumption habits undergo a significant shift. Fewer than 20 percent of them rely primarily on products from their own farms, while over 50 percent opt for a combination of products, obtaining some from their own fields and others from the market. Around 30 percent exclusively depend on the market for their consumption needs. Ramhari Sijapati admitted that:

In the past, we used to consume what we cultivated ourselves, with an abundance of rice and corn harvested from our own fields, which provided enough sustenance for the entire year. Our market purchases were limited to essentials like salt. However, things have changed, and now we procure and consume a wide range of products, such as rice, pulses, and vegetables from the market. The scenario has shifted, as there are fewer farmers in our community. In addition to farming, many of us are also engaged in work outside the agricultural sector. Consequently, our livelihood has become increasingly reliant on market-sourced products.

This indicates that individuals who have moved to new areas have reduced their dependence on agricultural products, citing the high costs and scarcity of labor as reasons. As a result, there is an increasing dependence on products obtained from the market in their consumption patterns. This shift is influenced by several factors, including easy access to markets and roads in their new residence, as well as connections to urban areas. The architectural style of their homes mirrors that of urban areas, and even their clothing and dietary preferences change. Their kitchens adopt a mixed approach, utilizing both firewood and gas for cooking.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of Nepalese society is not solely a result of migration but is also influenced by changes in residential locations. People are shifting from higher-altitude areas to lower ones or closer to markets and roads. This phenomenon aligns with findings from Deluca et al. (2005) and Diewald and Mayer (2009), which suggest that individuals relocate their homes to access improved infrastructure, services, and amenities. Additionally, some

choose to move after generating income through non-farm activities, such as selling their land to construct new houses near roads and marketplaces. It is observed that residential relocations are often driven by income sent from family members working abroad or by land sales. This highlights that their income is being invested in sectors other than agriculture. Consequently, these relocations foster the emergence of new types of social relationships. The influence of the market is growing, and bonds among newcomers who are not relatives are strengthening. Visits to old residences and interactions with old relatives, even if nearby, become infrequent, with gatherings mostly reserved for festivals. This shift introduces fresh connections and affiliations with new neighbors who are not part of their kinship, and these bonds are celebrated on various occasions. As part of this transformation, people are transitioning from traditional farming to non-farm occupations and adjusting their lifestyles accordingly. Moreover, their consumption patterns have evolved from subsistence agriculture to market-oriented production. Overall, the process of relocating residences has brought about significant changes in the social structure of rural areas in Nepal.

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