

<i>Received: July 2021</i>	<i>Received in revised form: September 2021</i>	<i>Accepted: November 2021</i>
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## **The Newars of the Hills : Remigration and Integration in the Kathmandu Valley**

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### **Abstract**

This paper describes the Newar's outmigration from Kathmandu valley to the eastern hills of Nepal and their remigration in the Kathmandu valley. It explores various causes of outmigration such as migration for trade, employment, kin based migration, forced migration and so on. However, the causes of remigration to their ancestral land is not because of their loyalty and being highly patriot to the ancestral land but because of searching various opportunities in the Valley. Based on both primary and secondary data the paper analyzes the ways of their social and cultural integration through different *guthi* and *samaj*. The re-migrated Newars are socially, culturally and economically interdependent and unified each other on the basis of their territory and their origin in the hills. Their integration in the valley is based on the social, cultural and economic needs. The inter-caste and interethnic integration in the valley represents both territorial and social structural based identity of the hills. However, the paper concludes that the inter-caste and interethnic based integration may be fragmented due to the economic prosperity of household members and increased number of households of their own caste and ethnic groups.

Key Words: Newar, Integration, *Guthi-Samaj*, Outmigration-remigration, Identity

### **Background**

The Newars are indigenous people of the Kathmandu Valley. Their population is 5.4 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics-CBS, 2012). But, today they live in almost all districts of Nepal. The Newars have also migrated to many countries in the world. They are culturally rich. The feast, festivals, *Jatra*, *Parva*, custom, and tradition are not only unique but also a major part of the Newars' identity. Such an identity distinguishes the Newars from other castes and ethnicities in Nepal.

Scholars who studied the Newars unanimously claim that they were intermixed of multiple castes and ethnic groups of Nepal (Nepali, 1965; Bista, 1967; Sharma, 2039 B.S.). It took

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a long time to intermix. It is obvious that the process of fusion began from the Gopal dynasty and continued up to the Malla dynasty in Kathmandu Valley.

When people talk about the Newars of Nepal they make an image of Kathmandu Valley; art and architecture, *Jatra* and *Parva* relating to the Newars residing in the Valley. But, people either know very little about the Newars residing in the different settlement areas of Mountain, Hills and Terai region of Nepal or they simply ignore them. It is a matter of surprise for many people if some Newar says that they are from other districts like Solukhumbu or Khotang because Solukhumbu is synonymous to Sherpa and Khotang is to Rai community. Indeed, the population of Newar is very less in the respective districts. They are in minority and always struggling to maintain their identity in the hills. The loss of mother tongue, acculturation, and sometimes different physical appearances than the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley give space to raise questions on their identity in the hills and in the Kathmandu Valley. That's why the Newars who are settled outside of the Valley are shadowed in the academic sectors per se.

This paper attempts to examine the remigration and reintegration process of the re-migrated Newars from Solukhumbu and Khotang districts (the hills) to the Kathmandu Valley. More specifically, it tries to analyze how the re-migrated Newars unite with each other to maintain their socio-cultural integration and identity. It also highlights on inter-cultural and inter-regional integration of the migrants' Newars with the people of different caste and ethnicity residing in their locality in the Kathmandu Valley. However, I have described the outmigration of the Newars from the Kathmandu valley to contextualize the paper.

### **Methods and materials**

This study is based on the re-migrated Newars from Solukhumbu and Khotang districts (hills) and settled in different parts of Kathmandu Valley being a member of different *guthi* or *samaj* they established.

This paper is qualitative in nature. I applied unstructured interviews with the re-migrated Newars currently residing in the Kathmandu Valley. In addition, I participated in many social, cultural, religious, and economic activities of the re-migrated Newars. Observation supported me to examine and analyze the level and ways of social and cultural integration. I carried some information through key informants' interviews and kuragraphy. The secondary sources were also used when necessary.

### **Outmigration**

Migration is a movement of people from one place to another for various reasons such as being a refugee or victims of natural disasters; for better opportunities and easy livelihood. Migration may be voluntary or forced. Migration by their own will in search of easy livelihood, better education, or better jobs can be categorized as voluntary migration.

Whereas migration due to natural calamities or political disturbances such as refugees is forced migration.

Migration is a major cause of socio-cultural and economic change of the migrants. Migration not only affects social integration, disintegration, acculturation, and assimilation processes (Heide, 2001) but also raises the question of identity and change (Fuerer-Haimendorf, 1964; Lewis, 1989, 1993; Gellner, 2012). According to Schneller (2001) influx of international in-migrants creates serious problems on integration. Hence, migration is not only understood simply as the mobility of people but also the subject to change in the migrants' identity. Hoffmann (2001) argues that mobility and changes are to be analyzed through regional, national and international political and economic influences.

The studies on the Newars show that they were indigenous people of the Kathmandu Valley (Hamilton, 1819; Wright, 1877; Nepali, 1965; Bista, 1967) and out-migrated to different parts of Nepal, Tibet, Darjeeling, and Sikkim (Lewis & Shakya, 1988; Bista, 1967; Shrestha, 2006, 2015; Rajbhandari, 2013; Robertson, 2020) for various purposes. But, a commonly agreed argument on the Newars' out-migration is their involvement in trade. This argument is widely accepted because of their involvement in the various kinds of trades inside and outside the country. However, it is an injustice to keep different things in a single basket. So, we had better see some other reasons for the Newars' out-migration.

There are several reasons for the Newars' out-migration. The first is the migration for trade which is widely acceptable (Bista, 2030 B.S, 1980; Shrestha, 2006, 2015; Rajbhandari, 2013). The story of Tibet trade and the Newars in Tibet by Bista (1980), the trade of *gundruk* by Laxmidas Pradhan in Darjeeling (Shrestha, 2015) support this argument.

But, the second argument is quite different and supports the forced migration of the Newars. It is said that some Newars were forced to leave the Kathmandu Valley when King Prithivi Narayan Shah conquered the Valley and this was continued thereafter. Shrestha (2015) writes "the migration of the Newars from Nepal to the Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim began in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (p. 1) .... Many Newars went exile in order to escape the torture and save their lives" (p. 4). Similarly, Pradhan (2018) states Gorkha conquest in Nepal Valley in 1769 A. D. was the cause of the Newars' out-migration. However, the ill behavior of the Gorkhali rulers on the Newars compelled them to leave the Kathmandu Valley (Shrestha, 2010; Tuladhar, et al., 2011; Sakasita, 2020). The forced migration was due to social, cultural, and political conflicts between the Newars and Gorkhali rulers.

Interestingly, the cause of forced migration is not similar. Robertson (2020) writes the ways King Rana Bahadur Shah exiled the Newar families and the hardest days they spent on the way to Tama Koshi due to the threat of smallpox in the Kathmandu Valley.

In 1799 .... Rana Bahadur, distraught and furious, desecrates and destroys the

temple of Hariti ma (known to Hindus as Sitala) at Swayambhu. Rana bahadur also orders children with the disease removed outside the Valley, all the way across the Tama Kosi in the East or the Marsyandi in the West. ...parents faced heartbreaking difficulties. They led them away, carrying one child on the back, one child under the arm and dragging along a third child. After a week, the families reach the Tama Kosi. There, a child dies. Unable to say goodbye the proper way, the devastated parents throw the body into the river (Robertson, 2020).

These stories support the second argument i.e., forced migration, on the Newars' out-migration.

Out-migration as artisans and government employees is the third reason. Although the Newars prefer trade, their "society was known for literate elite, successful businessmen, talented artists and skilled agriculturalist" (Lewis & Shakya, 1988, p. 29). Bista (2030 B.S.) states that the Newars' out-migration was for trade and not for holding land and farming. As good artists, some Newars migrated to different parts of Nepal and Tibet. Some Newars migrated as state employees to supervise the government on mining, minting, weaving, and other types of production (Lewis & Shakya, 1988).

Finally, Kinship is a major cause of their out-migration. Second and third-generation Newars were pulled by their kin connections. In addition to these, local disputes among the Newars and economic obligations forced them to leave their homeland and look for alternatives.

The outmigration of the Newars from the Valley is the major cause of change in their identity. The Newars who permanently settled in Khumbu became Newar Sherpa (Fuerer-Haimendorf, 1964) but who traded with Tibet followed Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet and Hindu Buddhists in Nepal because of getting married in both Tibet and Nepal (Gellner, 2012).

Now, the Newars from the hills and terai are in the process of remigration inside the Valley. However, the reasons for their re-migration are not similar to the Newars' out-migration. The present migration is mostly labor migration from the rural to the urban and from the hills to the Valley and the terai. The following section of this paper highlights on the causes of remigration inside the Valley and their integration process through social and cultural institutions such a *guthi* or *samaj*.

### **Remigration**

This section of the paper deals with the representative causes of the Newars' remigration and the social, cultural, and economic crisis they faced in the Valley. I argue that such a crisis compelled them to reunite and reintegrate in the Valley. As a result, they established social, cultural, and economic institutions. These institutions have played a vital role in their integration and maintaining their identity.

The cause of migration in Nepal is almost common for all caste and ethnic groups. Limited opportunities such as lack of good education, health services, and employment opportunities, and so on are common push factors of migration in Nepal. Similarly, Kathmandu Valley not only applies political power but also access to the economy, education, health, social security, and development infrastructure. These aspects work as a pull factor for the people who in-migrate to the Valley. The re-migrated Newars also experience similar causes of migration. Generally, trade, education, kin connection, and employment opportunities are the factors to promote the Newars to re-migrate to their ancestral land. While asking for causes of the re-migration, a 40-year male replies:

I am from Solukhumbu district. I arrived in Kathmandu 25 years ago to read in grade 11. I completed my Master's Degree. I worked at a private school long time as a teacher. Later, I established my own private school 13 years ago. I had no idea of living in the Kathmandu Valley permanently but due to the lack of opportunities at my village (Solukhumbu) I had no more options. So, I settled here permanently. Now, I built a house in Gokarneswor -8, Kathmandu (Mr. Shrestha, personal communication, August 15, 2020).

The case illustrates the re-migration of the Newars for education. Some of the other re-migrated Newars also have the same story. They did not re-migrate at the Kathmandu Valley because it is the land of their ancestor but because of the basic survival and for seeking a better education.

Trade is another cause of the Newars' re-migration inside the Valley. Newars and the *byapar* (trade) are almost synonymous. It is very hard to find the *bazaar* without the Newars. The traders who earned much in their village dream to run a big business in the Valley. Some Newars just run small tea shops and other established factories and industries in the Valley. A 61-year male, who runs a factory in Gokarneswor shares his story of remigration inside the Kathmandu Valley. He tells:

Forty years ago, I was a government employee in Salleri –Solukhumbu. I had operated a lodge along with my job. My family members had run that business. We earned some amount of money from that business. So, we planned to move to Kathmandu for conducting other business. We re-migrated inside the Valley 37 years ago. Earlier, I started a small tea shop in Kathmandu and then this factory (Mr. Shrestha, Personal communication, August 25, 2020).

There are few cases of such migration from Khotang district but the number of labor migration is comparatively higher than other forms of migration. The re-migrated Newars work in various sectors of tourism such as trekking, mountaineering, and travel company, and so on. Some of them own trekking and travel company. Some others are school

teachers, engineers, lecturers in university, researchers, and so on. Interestingly, there is few case of daily wage laborers among the re-migrated Newars in the Valley.

Kinship has a prominent role in Nepali society and culture. Many spheres of society such as politics, administration, and economy are heavily influenced by *afno manchhe* (nepotism) and *cakari (chakari)* system in Nepal (Bista, 1991). Our society is different than the Western one because parents depend upon the children in their old age in contrast to enjoying at Old Care Home. We need our kin connection for social and cultural performances. Hence, we are connected through kin-based migration too.

Obviously, some of the Newars re-migrated to follow their children in the Valley. It shows that migration is caused by kin connections too. A migration through kinship relation is stated as 'strong' ties by Mark Granovetter (Childs & Choedup, 2019). The causes of first-generation re-migration inside the Kathmandu Valley may be different than the migrations of onwards generations but a kin connection has played a major role in their re-migration. Mr. Rajbhandari, 70 years old ex-high school teacher, who migrated from Khotang to Gokarneswor tells:

I was a high school teacher. I was in a socially respected position in my village. I moved to Kathmandu after my retirement from the school because my son, daughters, and in-laws are in Gokarneswor. I followed them because we need our children with us in our old age. There was no one to look after me in the village (Mr. Rajbhandari, Personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Kin-based migration is not new in Nepal and not only occurs among the Newars but also prevalent in almost all places in Nepal with people of all caste and ethnicity.

These facts and figures show the main causes of the Newars' re-migration in the Kathmandu Valley. Their re-migration inside the Valley has no connections with their ancestral land and their ancestors. They may be emotionally attached to their ancestral land in the Valley but the current reasons for their migration is not because of their ethnicity but because of pull and push factors that affect the people in general including the Newars.

### **Remigration and birth of *guthi* or *samaj***

Whatever the reasons for their re-migration, the coming sections of this paper will deal with the consequences of their re-migration and their social and cultural re-integration through different social and cultural organizations.

*Guthi* has a significant role in Newar society which binds each member together (Nepali, 1965). The hills Newar is not an exception. The *guthi* or *samaj* is prevalent in each Newar and non-Newar communities in Solukhumbu (Shrestha, 2018) that functions to fulfill their socio-cultural and economic needs (Shrestha, 2020). The re-migrated Newars practiced the

*guthi* or *samaj* system in the hills and the birth of *guthi* or *samaj* is just a continuation of their practices.

With a long breath, Mr. Shrestha tells, “I lost my small son in 2041 B.S. I had hard days because there was nobody to support me for his funeral, no relatives, no *samaj* or *guthi*. I don’t want to remember those days”. (Mr. Shrestha, Personal communication, September 5, 2020). “Fifteen years ago my brother committed suicide in the Valley. We had no *guthi* or *samaj*. I faced multiple problems although my relatives and friends helped us. I got the help because there were many re-migrants’ Newars and Chhetri in the Valley.” (Mr. K. Shrestha, Personal Communication, August 29, 2020).

These are the representative cases of the hard days of re-migrants and the problems they faced in the new destinations. A human being as a social and cultural being requires society and people to share their sorrow and happiness. That’s why the re-migrated Newars established separate *guthi* or *samaj* in the Valley. Now, I move to describe the different *guthi* or *samaj* and how the re-migrated Newars integrate and reintegrate through such institutions.

### **1. Khotang Jilla Aiselukharka Newar Samaj**

Khotang *Jilla Aiselukharka Newar Samaj* was formed to solve the social and cultural issues of the re-migrated Newars from Aiselukharka (a small bazaar on the hills). The Newar *Samaj* consists of 83 households residing in the different places of Kathmandu Valley. The *samaj* works on a need basis for each of the member households to facilitate social and cultural issues. The general assembly elects the executive committee for the fixed tenure. The executive committee is solely responsible for handling the issues, rituals, and funeral procession in consultation with the victim’s family. The *samaj* has written rules and regulations which are to be strictly followed by member households. For example, each member household should attend funeral procession and go to look after the deceased family by turn. The executive committee publishes the written routine to look after the deceased family.

The main objective of the *samaj* is to provide social, cultural, and economic support to the deceased family. Hence, the *samaj* collects Rs. 1000 from each member household and provides to the deceased family. In addition to this, each member household should collect another one thousand rupees annually as a membership renewal charge. This is the gross income of the *samaj*. The executive committee can spend that amount for the betterment of the *samaj* and run it properly.

However, there is no obligation to invite and attend the member households in marriage or other rituals and performances. If invited, the member households may decide about the gift and other supports. The *samaj* has no decisive role as it is in the death rituals.



## 2. Newar *Samaj Guthi* Solukhumbu

Newar *Samaj guthi* Solukhumbu has 60 households (4 non-Newar households) members residing in different places of the Kathmandu Valley. The structure and function of the *samaj* is almost same as it is in the *samaj* of Khotang. The Newar *samaj* collects Rs. 600 from each member household to assist the death victim's family but they collect Rs. 1200 annually to run the *samaj* effectively.

## 3. Solu Kathmandu *Milan Samaj*

Solu-Kathmandu *Milan Samaj* is another institution for uniting and solving the socio-cultural, economic problems of the re-migrated Newars and non-Newars from Solukhumbu district. The *Milan Samaj* consists of 48 (11 Newars and other non-Newars) household members. The structure and function of the *Samaj* are comparatively similar to the other two *samaj* discussed earlier. But a difference is in collecting and submitting money to the dead victim's families. Solu-Kathmandu *Milan Samaj* collects Rs. 2000 annually to run the *samaj* and collects Rs. 1000 from each member household for providing to the deceased families when the death occurs. In addition to this, the deceased family gets Rs. 10000 from the *samaj* to conduct the funeral procession.

In addition to these social and cultural institutions, the re-migrated Newars from Khotang and Solukhumbu have established separate cooperatives to deal with financial activities. Hence, the Newars united together socially, culturally, psychologically and economically through such *guthi* or *samaj*.

## Discussions

The facts and figures on remigration reveal the factors affecting remigration in the Kathmandu Valley. The causes of remigration vary individually but both pull and push factors of migration are responsible for the Newars remigration in the Valley. Obviously, Kathmandu is their ancestral land. Their ancestors out-migrated from the Valley due to various reasons in different periods of time. The most common reasons were trade, forced migration, and kin connections. But the causes of remigration are also somehow similar to the out-migration of their ancestors, except the forced migration. I argue that the remigration of the Newars is not because of loyalty and respect to their ancestral land but because of searching for better opportunities and easy lifestyles.

Anthropologists/ sociologists argue differently on the nature of social solidarity. Durkheim's (1964, first published in 1893) writing is a classic milestone for social solidarity in the society. Focusing on the 'collective conscience' he used two different terms mechanical and organic solidarity to describe how society people get integrated in primitive and modern societies. Radcliffe Brown (1935) emphasizes on structural



arrangements of individuals in the society based on kinship and Malinowski (1939) focused on the functions of culture as satisfying individuals' bio-psychological needs.

It is a compulsion to establish *guthi* or *samaj* for the re-migrated Newars to conduct rituals and ceremonies. The establishment of *guthi* or *samaj* not only supported to fulfill their immediate socio-cultural and economic needs but also contributed to their solidarity. Social and cultural solidarity make them easy to conduct their rituals, rites, and ceremonies. Such solidarity has psychological effects too. The household members feel secured while interacting with the people to their next door. In some of the cases, the household members take rituals, festivals celebration and other functions as an opportunity to demonstrate how united the re-migrated Newars and non-Newars are. But actually, being a member of such *guthi* or *samaj* is their need for adapting to the newly migrated destinations.

The re-migrated Newars experienced the hardest situation until they were able to establish *guthi* or *samaj*. Hence, *guthi* or *samaj* is a by-product of their low socio-economic status and inability to perform rituals especially death rituals in the Kathmandu Valley. In a sense, *guthi* or *samaj* is mainly established to conduct funeral rites easily and also to perform other rituals associated with death, which is essential and compulsory for each household member.

*Guthi* or *samaj* are identity bench-marks of the re-migrated Newars. This argument can be proven by the names of their *guthi* or *samaj* they established in the Valley. Each *guthi* or *samaj* either prefix or suffix the names of the land they came from. For example, Khotang Aiselukharka Newar *samaj*, Newar *samaj guthi* Solukhumbu or Solu Kathmandu *milan samaj* have added the names of their places of origin. It means the re-migrated Newars want their separate identity in Kathmandu Valley. They identify themselves by the origin of the hills. This is because the rituals, rites, customs, and traditions of the hills' Newars are different than the Newars of Kathmandu Valley. The hills' Newars are acculturated with Hindu Brahmin and Chhetri. Most of the Newars in the hills lost their mother tongue (Shrestha, 2011). Losing their mother tongue is the most striking act that sometimes humiliates the hills' Newars in front of the Newars in the Valley because some Newars in the Valley laughs or make jokes to the hills' Newar for their inability to speak Nepal *bhasa*. This is the reason that the re-migrated Newars have kept themselves in different baskets without assimilating to the Newars of Kathmandu Valley. And also prefer to manage their affinal kinship with the Newars of the hills rather than the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley.

Surprisingly, two *guthi* or *samaj* named after Solukhumbu has non-Newar members. It is questionable, why didn't they unite in a single *guthi* or *samaj* and instead of integrating with non-Newars? Settlement pattern or caste and ethnic composition of their past land may determine their membership in the *guthi* or *samaj*. For example, the Newars of Newar *samaj* Solukhumbu lived in the district headquarter Salleri of Solukhumbu with a larger

number of the Newar households. As a result, there are only four non-Newar members in their *guthi* whereas Solu-Kathmandu *milan samaj* consists of only twelve Newar households and the rest of the others are non-Newars. These Newars were from a village in Solukhumbu with a majority of Chhetri.

In contrast to *guthi* or *samaj* named after Solukhumbu, Khotang Aiselukharka Newar *samaj* has no non-Newar members. It is because the majority of the Newar population is at their place of origin and in the Valley too.

The settlement pattern, the history, size, and structure of the population along with other factors determine their membership on the *guthi* or *samaj* in the Valley. Hence, identity itself is the reflection of the land, history, and culture in the past.

### **The *guthi*, *samaj*, and social solidarity in the future**

The *guthi* or the *Samaj* is the by-product of re-migrated Newars with their stories of sorrow. They established *guthi* or *samaj* at the time when the re-migrated Newars were economically weak and struggling for adaptation in the Kathmandu Valley. But today, many things have been changing day by day. The household members are economically independent and well-adjusted in their locality. Some household members have been associated with multiple *guthi* or *samaj*. They are the members of inter-caste and inter-regional *guthi* or *samaj* associating with their new locality in Kathmandu. Probably, economic well-being and inter-caste/ inter-regional unity may make the Newars' *guthi* or *samaj* weak.

Identity politics may weaken or supports to divide the *guthi*. For example, some *guthi* were formed with the representation of their hills' land. Such *guthi* or *samaj* has formed by the memberships of different caste and ethnic groups. By the time, when the household population of the same caste and ethnic people gets exceeded, either they may decide to split the *guthi* and form the separate one or create social and cultural conflict. Such a conflict and contradiction leads to the split of *guthi* or *samaj* in the future.

The *guthi* or *samaj* may also be weak or split due to the passive interaction and participation of the new generation in different activities. Hence, it is essential to make their active participation and submit certain roles and responsibilities to the younger generation.

### **Conclusion**

Migration is one of the major factors for bringing multiple problems and issues among the migrants in the new destinations. It is really hard to adjust to the new socio-cultural, economic, and environment. The migrants face psychological issues such as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Shrestha, 2018) in the new destinations. The social, cultural, economic crisis gives birth to social and cultural institutions such as *guthi* or *samaj*.

Functionalists believe that each social and cultural institution has certain functions that address and satisfies the needs of the individual in the society (Warms & McGee, 2004). The *guthi* or *samaj* of the re-migrated Newars functions to conduct the rituals and rites, mostly the death rituals. This is a socio-cultural integration but supplementary to economic needs that each household faces during the death rituals.

The presence of multiple *guthi* or *samaj* proves that people solve their crisis and problems through the *samaj* or *guthi* without compromise in their identity. The caste and ethnic-based identity is not the end for the re-migrated Newars as it is in the Newars of Kathmandu Valley. The territory-based identity is supported to include the non-Newar households in the *guthi* or *samaj*. This also distinguishes the hills Newars from the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley. Finally, the economic prosperity of each household member and little interaction with the second generation may minimize the importance of *guthi* or *samaj*. As a result, it may split or remains inactive in the future.

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