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Motivations for Work Out-Migration among Rural Households: A Case of Rural Tarai, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

A nation whose economy is based primarily on agriculture is becoming increasingly concerned about the tendency of rural out-migration. The focus of this research is on important motivating factors that drive migration from rural areas. The stories of the rural residents of Eastern Tarai village serve as the basis for this interpretation. Although De Jong and Fawcett's value-expectancy model is helpful in explaining rural out-migration, this work has not fully adhered to it. To comprehend the results, two motivational concepts that are closely related to "demotivation's" and "expectations" have been conceptualized. Demotivation, which are based on four prevailing situations land poverty and unemployment, deteriorating agriculture, an inadequate educational system, and ongoing social unrest are the negative motivation of rural people with relation to their current agricultural livelihood. Future social standing, lifestyle choices, and economic prosperity are all anticipated. When people decide to migrate, they do so with the hope of future affluence and social advancement. Migration has thereby contributed to the rural population's transition from reliance on agriculture to remittance dependency.

Keywords: Rural agriculture, Migration, Motivation, Demotivation and Expectation

INTRODUCTION

Mass labor out-migration from Nepal has been occurring, particularly to Malaysia, Korea, and the Gulf countries. Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) recorded about 52.8 percent of the total households as having at least one migrant in 2010/11, of which 27.6 percent migrated within country and 32.8 percent outside country (CBS, 2011). The phenomenon of mass labour out-migration in Nepal has profound implications for both the economy and social structure of the country. According to the Nepal Migration Report 2022 by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), approximately 60 percent of households

reported having at least one migrant in 2021, illustrating a growing trend in labour migration (MoLESS, 2022). The report notes that more than 4 million Nepalese workers are currently employed abroad, with a significant number in Gulf countries, Malaysia, and South Korea (MoLESS, 2022).

The reliance on foreign remittances remains pivotal for Nepal's economic stability, with remittances accounting for about 25 percent of the GDP in 2021 (World Bank, 2022). This influx of remittances has been a crucial factor in reducing poverty rates; a recent study indicates that remittances have contributed to a 30 percent decrease in poverty levels since 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Furthermore, rural areas, which constitute more than 70 percent of Nepal's population, generate roughly 85 percent of the country's total labour migration (International Organization for Migration, 2021).

However, the open border with India continues to complicate data collection. Many migrants travel informally, resulting in significant gaps in understanding the full scope of migration dynamics. The IOM's 2021 report highlights that around 2.5 million Nepalis are estimated to be living and working in India, but due to the absence of formal documentation, tracking these movements remains challenging (IOM, 2021).

The cultural shift towards dependence on migration as a livelihood strategy raises concerns regarding sustainability. While remittances provide immediate economic benefits, they may unintentionally lead to neglect in critical domestic sectors such as agriculture. Agriculture employs approximately 66 percent of the workforce and contributes about 28 percent of the GDP (FAO, 2022). As the local workforce decreases, questions about food security and economic resilience are becoming increasingly pressing.

Recent studies on migration and remittance in Nepal have evolved to include updated data that reflect a more comprehensive understanding of the factors motivating out-migration. While earlier research primarily relied on National Living Standards Survey (NLSS) data, concluding that poverty is the main driver for migration and that remittances play a vital role in alleviating poverty (Lokshin, Bontch-Osmolovski, & Glinskaya, 2007; Fafchamps & Shilpi, 2008), newer analyses have revealed more nuanced motivational aspects. According to a recent study by Adhikari (2022), motivations for migration encompass not only economic factors but also aspirations for education, better job prospects, and quality of life improvements. This shift indicates a departure from the previous notion that poverty is the sole impetus. Furthermore, prior studies often overlooked the complexities of international migration, particularly due to an open border with India. Recent research suggests that this phenomenon, alongside international migration trends, is gaining prominence and warrants closer scrutiny (Nepal Migration Report, 2023). Thus, this paper aims to provide a contemporary perspective on migration in Nepal, focusing on the underlying motivations from the viewpoints of rural households.

Approaches to Rural Out-migration for Work

Under social, psychological, and economic circumstances, psychological theories can be helpful in explaining why people migrate. They incorporate social and economic perspectives

and, in particular, use a framework for decision-making to explain migration. They primarily focus on elucidating the psychosocial drivers of human behavior with regard to migration and location changes, contingent on the social and economic circumstances. Four multiplicative components make up Sell and De Jong's (1978) motivational theory of migratory decision-making. The four elements are incentives, anticipation, motives, and availability. Availability refers to 'whether or not the change in behaviour under analysis is cognitively and/or physically possible.' Personal and/or situational strength of the objective toward which the decision process is focused' is the definition of motivation. The "decision maker's subjective assessment of the likelihood of goal attainment" is known as expectation. Lastly, according to Sell and De Jong (1978, 322), incentives "represent an array of goal-associated factors which variously encourage or discourage the change in behavior under consideration." In the event of migration, these elements act in tandem. Migration is not anticipated in the absence of either of them as their roles are multiplicative.

De Jong and Fawcett (1984) divided the reasons behind migration decisions into five groups. These include maximizing real or anticipated financial gains, achieving social mobility and social standing, contentment in one's home, forming relationships with family and friends, and achieving one's desired way of life. They offer a value-expectancy model for analyzing the reasons behind migration. The model's fundamental elements are expectancies (subjective probabilities) and goals (values, objectives). According to De Jong and Fawcett (1984, 47), the model addresses "a specification of the personally valued goals that might be met by moving (or staying) and an assessment of the perceived linkage, in terms of expectancy, between migration behavior and the attainment of goals in alternative locations." Wealth, status, comfort, stimulation, autonomy, connection, and morality are some examples of prospective values or aims. Belief and a desired result, like contentment with a different place, are expected.

It is desired to investigate the reasons behind rural residents' motivations to move away from reliance on agriculture to comprehend Nepal's rising rural out-migration. Investigating the causes of these drives would advance knowledge on rural out-migration. The idea that migration is driven primarily by economic prosperity is supported by a large body of research that argues that migration is an economic necessity. I also contend that the goal of economic growth is social prosperity. In this way, migration has been a tool to accomplish societal goals, and economic need is a means to those ends. The study of the reasons that drive migration and, consequently, discourage participation in rural agriculture is aided by motivational theory. Understanding migration reasons in economic, social, and psychological situations may be aided by the theories of migration motivations put forward by Sell and De Jong (1978) and De Jong and Fawcett (1984), which were previously examined.

METHODS

This study has utilized qualitative information obtained from the PhD study and part of a research project¹. The project conducted a survey collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in 2009 (Gurung, 2013). The qualitative data were collected as a subsequent process of main survey. The first part involved gathering quantitative data, while the second phase, which included focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews, collected qualitative

¹ As part of the research project, *Social Exclusion, Democratic Inclusion in Nepal*, conducted by Chr. Michelsens Institute (CMI), Norway and Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, during June 4, 2007 to February 28, 2010.

data. To find the houses with migrants required for the qualitative interview, a preliminary examination of the quantitative data was conducted. In-depth interview was conducted with head of households having migrants. The interview included about fifteen questions regarding history and context of migration, migration networks and the factors that motivate to leave home for work. About 25 in-depth interviews were conducted. Six focus group discussions were conducted: two among youngsters who intended to migrate in the future; two among returnees; and two among the guardians of migrants. Focus group discussions covered mainly individual level motivations and process of migration.

This study used content analysis and case studies, which are essentially two methods of analyzing qualitative data gathered through focus groups and in-depth interviews. Content analysis involved systematic analysis of qualitative data to identify patterns, themes and meaning. Case study involved in-depth investigation of a specific context of individual and family and event that shed lights into process and motivations for rural out-migration for work.

Profile of the study area

After that, Babiyabirta VDC was assigned to Morang District's Rangeli Municipality Wards No. 1 and 2. It is located 22 kilometers to the east of Biratnagar, the district center. This area has a total population of 16072 (Gurung & Shrestha, 2024), up from 14,486 in the 2001 Census (CBS, 2003). Residents of Babiyabirta come from both hill and Tarai origins, demonstrating the city's high level of ethnic variety. Approximately two-fifths of the population is hill-dwelling, having migrated from various central and eastern hill districts. There is also a lot of migration from India's neighboring state of Bihar. Majority of persons who moved from India at various points in time were members of the Tarai Middle Caste group and the Musahar.

Babiyabirta's average household size is 6.1, which is greater than the 3.8 national average. There are slightly more males than females, with 105.8 males for every 100 females. The sample population's mean age is 28.6 years, with a dependence ratio of 42% and roughly 58% of the population in the working age range (15–59 years). Seventy-three percent of people six years of age and over are literate. According to the survey, just 62.4% of families own land (Table 1). There are 0.194 hectares (or 5.7 Kattha) of land per household, which is about four times less than the national average of 0.79 ha (23.3 Kattha) (CBS 2006). This suggests that Babiyabirta's poverty rate is comparatively greater than the national average.

There are two distinct out-migration patterns in Babiyabirta, particularly regarding international migration, and they can be distinguished based on their destination. Destination-based migration patterns are strongly correlated with both ethnicity and economic level. Initially, there has been a consistent seasonal migration to various regions of India for many generations. The majority of Musahar and Tharu are landless and extremely impoverished, and this type of migration is common among them.

A small number of hill and Tarai clans from the same socioeconomic class also travel to India. Second, majority of hill-originated people migrate to third countries, primarily the Gulf and Malaysia (Khatriwada & Rai, 2024). Their primary destination of choice is the Gulf countries, where incomes are higher despite the increased investment required. As a result, the majority of the migrants are from upper socioeconomic classes, are primarily from hill country, and

include a small number of Khawas and Tharus. It is uncommon for Tarai migrants to travel to Malaysia and the Gulf countries.

In Babiyabirta, the overall out-migration rate is 17% of the sample population. At the household level, 41.3 percent of the sample homes (497) have at least one migrant who lives away from home for work. In Babiyabirta, it appears that having several migrants living in the same home is rather typical. There are 2.54 migrants per household, compared to just 1.24 nationwide (Table 1).

In Babiyabirta, 36.1 percent of people migrate internally. Sixty-four percent of the population migrates to other nations, particularly India. This is seven percentage points higher than the NLSS 2003/04 national average of 57.4% (Gurung 2012). However, according to NLSS 2003/04, 40 percent of migration is headed for India, while 30.7% of migration is headed for Babiyabirta. Babiyabirta has a third-country migration rate of 33.2%, about twice the national average as reported by NLSS 2003/04 (17.4%).

Table 1: Characteristic of sample population and households in Babiyabirta

Description	Value	N
Average household size	6.1	497
Sex ratio (number of males per 100 females)	10.8	3,037
Percent of working age population (15-59 yrs.)	58	3,037
Dependency ratio (%)	42	3,037
Mean age of sample population	28.6	3,037
Literacy rate (%)	73.1	2,745
Sample population with some education (primary+) (%)	86.8	2,042
Landholding (% households with land)	62.4	497
Average landholding (among households with land) (in hectare)	0.311	308
Average landholding (all sample households) (in hectare) (%)	0.194	495
<i>Gini</i> coefficient (inequality in land distribution)	0.816	497
Households with food sufficiency throughout the year (%)	67.6	497
Migrants including dependents (%)	17.0	3,037
Households having at least one migrant (%)	41.3	497
Households with internal migrants: <i>Within Nepal</i>	36.1	205
Households with international migrants destined to <i>India</i>	30.7	205
Households with international migrants destined to <i>third countries</i>	33.2	205

Note: Two exceptional cases are excluded.

Source: Field survey, 2009

DISCUSSION ON MAIN FINDINGS

Unemployment and land poverty

In Nepal, one of the main determinants of social and economic standing is land ownership. Approximately 38% of the sample homes in the study region do not own any land. Landholding per household in Babiyabirta is significantly smaller (about 0.2 ha) than the national average (0.7 ha) for all sample households (Table 1). The distribution of land is highly unequal (Gini=0.8). Few landowners own enough land to grow enough food to support themselves. There are few jobs in the area that are not related to agriculture. The only source of income is land, yet inadequate landholding suggests that full employment in agriculture is not achievable.

Underemployment and disguised unemployment are the two main forms of unemployment that occur in the research area. In the former case, they either lack land or have insufficient land to provide full employment. Obtaining paying employment outside of agriculture is impossible. Only a small portion of the land offers seasonal, part-time employment. They are completely unemployed when the paddy or other food grain plantations end. Underemployment is one of the issues that most households face.

Case 1. Lok Basnet, 42, a farmer at Babiyabirta-2, is head of 11 family members. He is the eldest son of his parents living with his wife and one son and a daughter (school age). He is accompanied by parents and four younger brothers and a sister and all are unmarried. Parents are still active. Father is a popular traditional healer in the area and gives his time to both healing and work in the field and mother does the household chores. His sister and wife accompany partially his mother in the household chore and work mostly in the field. A young brother (next to him) is in Qatar since last 5 years. Before departing to Qatar, he was working in a factory in Biratnagar where his income was very low, so he decided to leave the job and flew to Qatar. Two younger brothers accompany him full time in the field. The youngest brother is studying in college at Biratnagar and helps in the field during vacation. He has three bigha of land (about 2 ha.) that could give full employment only to him and his wife. They do not have other job or occupation. With this farm work, they have plenty of surplus time that could be utilized in productive work but no such work is available around. They have been using their time in local politics and sometimes in games, which is not of their interest. No options are left for Mr. Basnet and he is planning to send another brother to work abroad.

Here, Mr. Basnet asserts that the main factor driving young men to go overseas in search of employment, which has been rising over time, is disguised unemployment. It has a detrimental impact on agriculture, as seen by the declining marginal productivity of the sector. Unemployment and poverty are exacerbated by landlessness, reduced landholding, and a dearth of non-agricultural employment possibilities. This is one of the causes of individuals

being driven out of the village and compelled to leave rural homes, as respondents in Babiyabirta spontaneously reported.

Families of Tarai descent, who typically have little or no land, face an even more complex unemployment issue. For this, another case may be appropriate to understand complication of unemployment among Tarai origin people (Case 2).

Case 2. Rohan, 19, helped researcher during the field survey. He is high school graduate and previously he worked in a local communication centre. He is from a five-member family belonging to Tarai middle caste. Mother and younger sister are engaged in household chore. Father is an accountant in a brick factory in neighbour village. He is dependent on father's earning. His elder brother rarely comes home and has been working and living in Biratnagar but never supports his home.

They do not have any agricultural land except for the land the house sits in. Their only source of livelihood is their father's job. Father always asks Rohan to do something to support family, but he is not eager to do so. His only dream is to go to Gulf countries to earn money so that he can buy a motorbike. His father is frustrated because he is disinclined to work on the one hand, and on the other hand, he cannot afford to send his son to Gulf countries or Qatar.

A different message is conveyed by Rohan's case (Case 2). Because he has no job, he is unemployed. He dislikes working in the neighborhood. He simply wants to work overseas. It is challenging to determine what area of unemployment he is in in such a situation. Many young people in the rural area nowadays can relate to this story.

Demotivating rural agriculture

Relatively large landowners believe that the agricultural system has evolved over time. Alongside this shift, rural residents are becoming increasingly irate with land and agriculture. People attribute their dissatisfaction with agriculture farming to a number of factors, including rising unemployment, declining agricultural product values relative to other everyday consumer goods that need to be purchased in the marketplace, persistent social and political unrest, and a demotivating educational system. Rural unemployment also increased as a result of changes in the agricultural sector. Agriculture farming used to require a lot of labor, but these days it requires more cash. Improved seeds, chemical fertilizer, insecticides, improved ploughs, tractors, and thresher machines are examples of modern agricultural instruments that have been brought into farming.

It has decreased the need for human labor in farming. Although it was anticipated that employing more advanced technologies would boost land productivity, the marginal productivity has unexpectedly dropped. Reduced productivity is not solely attributable to the use of better technology. There are several other factors as well; one important factor is land fragmentation. Due to traditional norms governing the transfer of land from one generation to the next, the land has been divided into numerous small parts. The property that is passed

down to descendants as inherited property is called land. Babiyabirta's high level of land fragmentation may be seen by the average landholding of 0.1936 hectares. Compared to investment, using modern agricultural inputs on a small plot of land is not economical or productive.

As a result, the agriculture sector is currently experiencing a trade failure. A monetary computation of food grain output is shown in Case 3.

Case 3. Mr. Khadka, resident of Babiya-2 Khoriya, is a farmer. He has a family with five members – two sons and a daughter. Elder son is 22 and the younger is 20 years old and both are unmarried. He owns 10 Kattha of land (about 0.34 hectare). Because this land is not enough to feed them, he has rented two Bighas (about 1.35 ha.). He is paying 45 Mon paddy per year to landlord for the rent of the two Bigha land. Last year, he produced 90 Mon (1 Mon=40 Kg.) and earned 45 Mon. As Mr. Khadka reported, in two bigha of land, he spent a sum of Rs. 31,575.0:

Rs. 6,000.0 in chemical fertilizer (DAP² 60 Kg.+Urea 60 Kg.+Potash 30 Kg.)

Rs. 7,000.0 in wage for transplanting (70 persons percent Rs. 100.0)

Rs. 8,000.0 in wage for ploughing the land (80 persons percent Rs. 100.0)

Rs. 2,000.0 in wage for weeding (20 persons percent Rs. 100.0)

Rs. 2,500.0 in wage for paddy cutting (25 persons percent Rs. 100.0)

Rs. 6,075.0 in thrashing and collecting (@15 per 100 Mon; 1 Mon= Rs. 450.0)

His contribution along with his wife has also been included. Income from paddy production is equivalent to Rs. 20,250.0 (45 Mon percent Rs. 450.0). By subtracting expenses of Rs. 31,575.0 would be Rs. – 11,325.0. The production is deficit. However, he does not sell the paddy and 45 Mon will be used for feeding family for a whole year. He will manage his deficit with the production of other food grains and seasonal vegetables such as wheat, mustard, maize. He does not have to pay rent for other production. Mr. Khadka reports that his two sons are currently working in Delhi. They are also sending some money occasionally.

Rural farmers are becoming more reliant on enhanced agricultural inputs as a result of the adoption of new technologies. However, because of the government's erratic supply, citizens frequently confront a shortage of improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, and insecticides when they are most needed. Most farmers are forced to purchase fertilizers on the illicit market, and only a select few wealthy farmers have timely access to them. Farmers are occasionally forced to use fertilizers that have expired, and they are required to pay a price that is considerably more than the actual cost. According to a farmer, a local Biratnagar trader was granted

² DAP - Diammonium Phosphate, a chemical fertilizer.

permission to supply fertilizer to Morang last year. However, he only sold fresh fertilizer once his previous stock ran out, and he had some fertilizer that had expired.

Reduced wheat yield was the outcome of farmers who had little choice but to purchase the date-expired fertilizer. According to the farmer, it is therefore preferable to use inferior Indian fertilizer since in the research area, inferior chemical fertilizer is imported from India's neighboring border and purchased on the local illegal market. However, strict border security during planting season makes it challenging to obtain fertilizer, even on the underground market. The fact that farmers seldom receive a fair price for their agricultural products is another problem related to declining marginal productivity. Farmers sell their harvest during the season for less than half the price they would have to pay to get the same quantity of food grains at the time of necessity.

Sometimes the difference is more than two or three times as large. This situation occurs because brokers and businesses, rather than the government and administration, control both agricultural inputs and outputs. This is a result of the total liberalization of agriculture as well as the absence of specific government policies and initiatives pertaining to marginal farming and agriculture. People become frustrated and are inspired to abandon agriculture in favor of other sources of income.

Majority of people are subsistence farmers, except for a few large landlords. The research area is primarily planted with paddy, wheat, maize, and a few pulses; cash crop production is uncommon there. Even though these food grains are just sufficient to cover their basic expenses, people still need to sell some of them to cover essential home expenses, but they won't receive a fair price. In comparison to their labor, total investment, and other consumer items, their income from agricultural production is pitifully low. To illustrate this argument, a straightforward comparison between pig farming and agricultural production might be useful.

Social and political unrest in rural livelihood

People are less inclined to invest in land and agriculture due to psychosocial considerations as well. In addition to motivating out-migration from the hamlet, two relevant topics regarding social and political turmoil are highlighted. First, it increases resentment of village property accumulation and rural agriculture. According to reports, during the Maoist insurgency, Babiyabirta was one of the districts most impacted by warfare. People were facing economic and bodily threats because of the bloody political strife. In the past, the Maoists' battle was solely political in nature. People might voice their complaints, lodge grievances, and reach a political agreement with Maoists at certain locations.

However, this is no longer the case, and the rise of new armed organizations is causing the Hill people to suffer from this subsequent violence. There is nowhere for people to complain or ask for assistance, and a sort of confrontation between Madhesi and those from the hills has arisen. People do not want to possess more property and produce because they are forced to give them donations based on land and productivity. Rather, they wish to purchase a plot of property in the city where they feel secure for their future residence and send their family members to work overseas.

Second, young men have been compelled to leave their hometown due to social and political upheaval. Since they posed a threat to all sides of the battle, this procedure has continued since the Maoist insurrection. For example, security agents suspected young males who were not linked with the Maoists of being government spies. Guardians were forced to force their children to leave the village in such circumstances, and leaving for foreign work, even if it was not advantageous, was one choice.

Education system and unemployment

The education system in Nepal is often criticized for being impractical, focusing on producing clerks and bureaucrats rather than practical skills. Many believe that those with education should work in offices, and agricultural work in rural areas is seen as a waste of time and resources. Consequently, educated youths feel compelled to migrate to cities or abroad for better opportunities, yet finding jobs remains difficult. Poor and rural residents report that employment is restricted to the elite, leading to scepticism about the value of higher education. Young people like Rohan (Case 2), who has passed SLC but prefers going abroad for work, and Hari Basnet, who abandoned his Bachelor studies in Business for a job in Malaysia, illustrate this trend. Similarly, Suman (Case 5) values migration over education. These individuals often conclude that basic literacy is sufficient, as the effort and expense of higher education seem meaningless without job opportunities that match their qualifications. Thus, higher education correlates with unemployment, demotivating youth from pursuing it and motivating them towards migration instead.

Case 4. Mr. Basnet, 25, was a first boy in his class in secondary school nearby his home. He passed school leaving certificate (SLC) with first division and joined college in Biratnagar in Business Management. During his study, he worked for a business house as an accountant. His salary was only 3 thousand. He saw how much money a businessperson could earn from the business. This inspired him to become a businessman and ingrained in him an idea that even if he luckily got a higher-level service/job after his study, he would never be able to earn money in comparison to business.

However, given his family who were into subsistence agricultural farming, his family resources were unable to provide him with the resources to start a business. His two brothers who were in Qatar had both built a house in Biratnagar. So, he decided to drop his study while he was studying in Bachelor and planned to go to Qatar to earn enough money so that he can start of a business in future. Unfortunately, he was unable to get a visa for Qatar in time. Instead, he went to Malaysia. After a year in Malaysia, he came back home to try for Qatar again.

Although they all believe that obtaining a higher education cannot lead to employment and financial gain, this does not necessarily imply that they do not wish to pursue further education. According to reports, nobody in Malaysia or the Gulf countries has a better level job with more education. Some people supervise the workers, which may not require a college

degree. This type of circumstance is what has caused people to think this way about schooling. Nonetheless, parents still favor giving their kids a quality education so they won't have to deal with the hardships of low-paying professions, and they hope that Nepal will eventually have employment opportunities.

Migration destination as social status

Rural agricultural societies are increasingly becoming migrant cultures through mass out-migration, with migration symbolizing social status. Domestic migration is viewed as less significant, while foreign migration, particularly to third countries, is highly valued. Social status is influenced by whether a household has a member abroad and the destination country of the migrant. Wealthier households typically send family members to countries like the USA, UK, Japan, and Australia for study and work, aiming for permanent residency post-study. In the study area of Babiyabirta, such affluent households are scarce.

There are three types of households that send members overseas for employment. Despite the expensive costs—which frequently reach Rs. 500,000 due to recruitment fees—those moving to Japan, Korea, Israel, and Hong Kong have the greatest status. Only descendants of ex-Gurkhas, specifically Rai in Babiyabirta, go to Hong Kong, and no households in the sample from the Tarai region send migrants to these nations.

The second status group consists of those with migrants in Malaysia and Gulf countries, where migration is now equally lucrative. Families prefer sending members to Gulf countries due to stricter regulations and a higher potential for savings. Long-term contracts are common in Qatar and Dubai, with many migrants from Babiyabirta working there for over a decade and enjoying leave benefits. These migrants typically come from hill origins, along with some Tharu and Khawas from Tarai indigenous communities.

Lastly, the lowest status is held by households whose members migrate to India, mostly from poor and landless backgrounds, including Musahar, Jhangar, Tharus, and Khawas of Tarai origin, who cannot afford the costs of migration to other countries.

Lifestyle preferences

Young people are not interested in working in agriculture. The instance of Rohan is pertinent to this discussion. They believe that their lifestyle and working in agriculture are incompatible. Young people are exposed to a new way of life that differs from rural agricultural life once they have completed high school or college. Because they are exposed to media, television, and movies, they become connected to the world and urban/city life. As a result of this exposure, their consumer behavior increases and they start acting natty and ambitious. However, they are unable to be tidy and clean when working in an agricultural area with dust, muck, and dirt. However, returnees are typically the village's role models.

However, returnees, former migrants, or migrants on leave typically serve as role models in the village. They can spend money in the market with their peer groups and wear well-maintained, fashionable clothing and shoes. In the community, they are regarded as heroes. Everyone wants to meet them and have a conversation. Some of them have even purchased

motorcycles and are showing them off throughout town. The cases of Suman (Case 5) and Rohan (Case 2) show that owning a motorcycle is one of the young people's most pressing desires. Agriculture cannot provide them with this kind of existence. This also encourages young people to migrate overseas in search of employment.

Case 5. Suman Khadka (18), Babiyabirta, is studying at grade eleven in Higher Secondary School at Ranjani. His family owns two Bigah of land, which is their primary source of livelihood. His father is a farmer and mother is a housewife. He has an elder brother and one elder (married) and a younger sister. The elder brother is in Qatar for more than six years. He utilizes his leisure time in the farm field. He has a dream to go to Dubai to earn money. Study is not his priority. He is studying since his visa has not been sent. According to him, dream of migration abroad comes from three incidents. The first incident according to him is that, six years ago, his father had a very hard time managing the money for migration of his elder brother. His father's expectation was that the son would earn money and support home including the younger brother and sister. He expectedly earned money and came home on leave and got married. Things became entirely different when he did not support a single penny. Instead, he bought a piece of land in Biratnagar and took his wife along. He sent all his income to his wife. Given this case, Suman harboured a dream to go abroad and support his parents and home. He wants to show his brother that he can also do well. Second, some of his friends who studied with him in school are in Dubai and Qatar. He finds his friends who come back home on leave now enjoys a different status at home and the village. When he goes around the village with his friends, he finds himself inferior to them, because people give importance to them while talking. He realizes that he will be offered the same prestige in the society if only when he goes abroad and earns some money. Three of his close friends have already bought motorcycle and they are enjoying their new motorcycle. He also wants to own a motorcycle, which he thinks is possible only when he goes abroad. Thirdly, one of his friends has been earning well in Qatar. Last year, a temple was constructed in the village. This neighbour was the number one donor. He donated Rs. 5,000.0 for temple construction. As a result, he is held in high esteem. Everybody praises him and he is now a person of admiration in the village. Given these incidents, Suman also dreams to contribute to his area that would benefit the villagers, which in turn would guarantee a high esteem. He says that this is possible only if he migrates for work abroad.

Economy as social status

Economic status and social relations are tightly related. Raising a household's economic well-being improves social relations, which in turn raises social status. Although this may not always be the case, it is real, particularly in societies with low economic standing like

Babiyabirta. Because economic poverty is widespread, as seen by the landholding position, there is an urgent need for economic welfare. Social issues are important for households with basic financial needs and economic issues are important for impoverished households. Referring to the straightforward idea that "one needs water when one is thirsty, and one needs bread when one is hungry." People associate poverty with migration.

At the time of the poll, an unskilled migrant worker in the Gulf countries makes at least Rs. 10,000.0 per month, while a graduate official in a government agency in Nepal makes only Rs. 13,000.0. The average salary for a semi-skilled migrant is Rs. 15,000.0. Other migrants are reportedly making over Rs. 20,000.0, and others are even making over Rs. 40,000.0. In Babiyabirta, the daily wage rate for farm labor is Rs. 100.0, which includes supper and snacks. However, as wage work is not a regular job, this does not add up to a monthly total.

During the busiest farming season, it could be consistent for a few weeks or months. Since the majority of Babiyabirta households own land sufficient for subsistence and work in the fields themselves, paid labor is uncommon during other seasons. Prior to traveling to Qatar, Mr. Basset's brother was employed at a Biratnagar factory (Case 1). His monthly income of Rs. 2,500.0 was insufficient to cover his other expenses, but it was enough to keep him alive. Then he asked his older brother to handle his international migration. Apart from the disparity in income, people are also motivated to migrate overseas by the hope of earning a certain amount of money (Case 6).

These instances speak for themselves and show that rural residents appear to view migrating overseas as a means of securing their future.

Case 6. A carpenter (Khawas) has been earning about five thousand and sometimes up to ten thousand per month within and outside Babiyabirta and sometimes at Biratnagar. He has good income for his family of five members. However, he is planning to go to a Gulf country. This is only because he has not been able to buy and add property especially land with his income. He hopes if he goes to a Gulf country, he will earn about Rs. 100,000.0 in a year to be able to buy a piece of land at Babiyabirta or at Biratnagar, if possible.

Additionally, people highlight a number of psychological aspects that drive their migration. People consider income when they invest in migration, and social standing when they acquire property and improve their financial situation. Although social and economic ties are complementary in the context of migration, social prestige and a respectable social life are the ultimate goals. Earning economic status is a process, and achieving social status through economic status is a migration objective.

In this sense, migration is a way to achieve social well-being and economic position, which confers social standing and reputation. Therefore, for migrants, economic success is a means to a shift in their social status rather than the objective.

Commendation, credibility and use of durable goods

The main markers of social standing related to migration are commendation, credibility with moneylenders and retailers, and the usage of durable items like televisions, cell phones, and motorcycles. Although these elements are separate, they are connected when it comes to social standing. It is easy to see that communication among people is eclipsed by migrants and migration overseas majority of public spaces, including tea shops, chowks, telephone shops, market centers, haat/bazaar, and any other location where two or more people gather. Since nearly all of the telephone shop's clients are families with ties to migration, it is one of the places where people talk about migrants and migration. Generally speaking, the subjects include who is giving money and who is not, how much money is being made, who is making phone calls to their homes, and what property was purchased. In this sense, the villagers take pride in the migrants and their families.

When remittances are better and some fixed property has been purchased, particularly when a house is built or a plot of land in Biratnagar is purchased, the level of commendation is significantly higher. Business owners, shopkeepers, and moneylenders have such a functional relationship with their consumers that they anticipate making a profit.

A low-income household without property or other means of earning money would not be able to purchase products on credit from stores. A moneylender will not lend money to a poor farmer unless he finds anything as collateral for the guarantee against his money or he perceives a chance that his money will be returned with some profit.

Case7. A widow woman (Dahal) in Birta Bazaar whose son is in Saudi Arabia since the last 2 years reports that, before, she could not buy anything in credit from the shops at the time when her son was at home. Now the situation is different. She can get all the daily consumer goods in credit and she also takes loan from neighbour businessman at the time of need.

In the village, there aren't many cooperatives or saving/credit organizations. Some of the wealthier community members form these groups. Rishidevas (Musahar) and other impoverished households are unable to contact these groups. Majority of the villages have money lenders. Most of the debtors are immigrants. The loan's interest rate is between 24 and 36 percent. The situation in Rishidevas village is typical in that there are little moneylenders that lend modest amounts of money, but the interest rate is 100%. Other moneylenders who charge between 24 and 36 percent are avoided by Rishidevas. The reasons are that they require a little sum of money, between Rs. 1,000.0 and Rs. 3,000.0, which is sufficient for their travel expenses within India.

However, because they have nothing to pledge as collateral, large moneylenders do not trust them. Therefore, their only choice is to pay 0% interest. These instances show how people who are involved in migration tend to behave when it comes to loans and rent. In this context, it is unusual that collateral is not required for loans, particularly those intended for migration purposes. Collaterals are required for various purposes. People migrate because they believe

that moneylenders may trust them to lend them money, as demonstrated by the cases of the Dahal woman and the Rishidevas.

CONCLUSION

In Babiyabirta, work migration primarily stems from economic motives, as individuals seek to earn a living and improve their livelihoods. However, as they achieve economic success, they begin to strive for social status and a dignified life, viewing migration as a pathway to social well-being, prestige, and ultimately social change. Migration has become a symbol of social status, with destinations affecting perceived status; for instance, migrating to Gulf countries and Malaysia is deemed higher status compared to India, though actual income levels can vary. Social status is often indicated by housing quality, urban residences, possession of durable goods like televisions and motorcycles, as well as financial stability through savings, loans, and donations.

Two interconnected viewpoints—"demotivations" and "expectations"—can be used to understand the reasons behind rural out-migration in Babiyabirta. Four causes contribute to demotivations, which are bad feelings about rural life:

- i. Poverty landlessness, inadequate land, and a lack of employment opportunities in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.
- ii. Frustrating agricultural systems—unprofitable farming practices, declining land productivity, and reduced agricultural product value relative to consumer goods.
- iii. Education system—current education does not align with agricultural needs, fails to translate easily into employment, and available jobs often do not match educational qualifications.
- iv. Social unrest—concerns about security, property risks, and threats to economic stability.

In contrast, expectations drive individuals to migrate, fuelled by the prospect of better futures. Three primary expectations emerge:

- i. Expected economic prosperity—migrants aim to escape poverty, improve their livelihoods, accumulate assets, and build homes in urban areas.
- ii. Lifestyle preferences—the younger generation, influenced by media and exposure to urban lifestyles, desires different living conditions than those available in rural areas.
- iii. Social status—the ultimate ambition is to attain higher social standing and a dignified, prestigious lifestyle.

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