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Socio-economic Adjustment of Rural Migrants in an Urban Setting: A Study of Sampang Rai Migrants in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Abstract

This article explores the socio-economic adjustment of rural migrants in the cities of Kathmandu Valley. This study was conducted among Sampang Rai migrants and utilizes the network theory of migration. Information was gathered through questionnaire using KoBoToolbox, in-depth interviews, and observation in the study areas. Sampang Rais migrate to the Kathmandu Valley to get an education, find better work, experience city life, help their families, get medical treatment, and learn new skills. The already established and available networks facilitate the selection of migration destinations and socio-economic adjustment in Kathmandu Valley. Friends, families, earlier migrants, and institutions assisted migrants to adjust socially and economically in the destination areas by providing information, physical resources, material resources, and sociocultural support. Sampang Rai migrants also made efforts to diversify their livelihood, keep strong connections with friends and families, join religious communities, learn new skills, exchange labour and encourage one another while they go through the process of socio-economic adjustment.

Keywords: rural migrants, socio-economic adjustment, Sampang Rai, network, Nepal

1. Introduction

Migration to a new place is never simple because of the challenges it can bring. Migration refers to an individual leaving the region of his or her birthplace and relocating to a new location

with a different environment, where he or she experiences social and cultural differences (Tharmaseelan, 2008). Migrants in a new place need to reconfigure their status, relationships, skills, knowledge, interaction, access to employment, and resources to meet or match their expectations in the host place. The migrant adjustment process is viewed as a complex experience of learning to live in a new and dissimilar culture, community, and environment, as well as a means of developing well-being so that they can return to their pre-migration status (Ryan et al., 2008; Tharmaseelan, 2008). In the scenario of the adjustment process, it is essential to consider migrant networks, the changing socio-economic environment, the support of migrants and the community of the host site, the duration of relocation, and the maintenance of ties with the place of origin.

Clewett (2015) mentions, after migrating from rural hill regions to urban cities or plain regions, migrants are exposed to new places and skills, as well as different methods of doing things. As a result, they acquire knowledge and skills beyond their agricultural expertise and must alter their expectations accordingly. Internal migrants, who move from rural to urban areas within their own countries, have stressful experiences and less happiness, so they need a good way to deal with stress if they want to get along with the locals and be accepted by them (Güngör, 2020; Hendriks et al., 2016). In the context of Nepal, people from different rural areas prefer moving to Kathmandu and settling there for various reasons, such as education, trade, employment, marriage, health treatment, and learning new skills for international migration. Subedi (2021) argues that 86% of the migrants in Nepal are rural-urban migrants, and 35% of all rural-urban migrants in the country reside in the Kathmandu metropolitan area. Roads and communication infrastructure make migration common, but it requires emotional, social, cultural, educational, and economic adjustments to the new place (Prafula & Jadhav, 2015). There are fewer studies related to the socio-economic adjustment of internal migration within Nepal. An important aspect of the migration study in this context is the adjustment of migrants in the host location, which covers the process, problems, and prospects of adjustment.

Thus, the main aim of this study is to explore the adjustment process and assistance that rural migrants received socially and economically in Kathmandu Valley for their socio-economic adjustment in urban settings, taking Sampang Rai migrants as the focus of the study. This descriptive study is linked with the network theory of migration. Based on this theory, Massey et al. (1993) point out that the continuation of migration is based on interpersonal ties through which networks are formed between former migrants and non-migrants or migrants and non-migrants based on kinship, friendship, and a shared community of origin. Shah (2000), giving an example of a network, states that the network plays a significant role in selecting migration channels as well as in negotiating benefits at the destination. Chapagain (2015) argues that the person who migrates with friends and family makes more income than those who come through agents in the new location. The following sections describe the research design, tools, data analysis, results, and discussion, and conclude the paper.

2. Methodology

Study area

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Kathmandu Valley, the capital city of Nepal, among Sampang Rai migrants from the Khotang district. Kathmandu is one of the most preferred destinations of the Sampang Rai migrants apart from Sunsari, Morang, Jhapa and Udaypur districts

of Nepal. Sampang Rais heavily reside in the northern part of Khotang. However, this community is also found to have been living in Bhojpur, Sunsari, and Ilam districts on a large scale and in Panchthar, Taplejung, Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha, Udayapur, and Jhapa districts on a small scale (Rai et al., 2015). The total country-wide population of the Sampang Rais is claimed to be nearly 50,000 (Toba et al., 2002) but the 2011 Nepal census states the population as 18,270 (CBS, 2012). Respondent migrants for this study were chosen from Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu districts within the Kathmandu Valley and migrated from Phedi, Khartamchha, Patheka and Baspani of Khotang district.

Sampling

In order to identify and explore the socio-economic adjustment of the Sampang Rai rural migrants in Kathmandu Valley, information was obtained from 104 people who experienced rural-to-urban migrations. The field study was conducted from September to November 2022 in Kathmandu Valley. The participants were purposively selected and asked to respond to the questionnaires. Similarly, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants after explaining the purpose of the study and receiving consent from participants and pseudonyms are used to maintain the privacy of the respondents. The percentage of the sampled respondents was 42.3% of men and 57.69% of women and among all participants, 98.08% were literate.

Research design and tools

This study used a descriptive research design with the linkage of the network theory of migration. Network theory helps to understand the ties of the migrants that play an important role in selecting types and destinations of migration and the support provided by the network in the adjustment process. Under this research design and tools like questionnaires, interviews and observation were used to collect information. Surveys and key-informant interviews were conducted among a variety of migrants of various ages (age 20-40, 70.19%, 40-60, 25%, 61 above 4.81%), educational backgrounds (basic literacy 4.81%, high school level 58.65, Bachelor level 21.15% and Masters level 13.46%), and economic and social statuses. The key informant interview was done with both new and old migrants who are well-known to the migrant community and institutions. Observations in the study area helped us verify the housing settlement, livelihood activities, living conditions and social interactions of the rural migrants in the destination. The KoBo ToolBox was used for the survey and the basic guidelines were prepared for the interviews and field observations.

Data analysis and interpretation

Quantitative data were analysed using the KoBo ToolBox and Microsoft Excel 2019. Key informant interviews and discussions were recorded using an audio recorder, and field observations were documented using a diary that was well-organized and securely stored. After the collection of the information through interviews, observation notes were translated and transcribed into the appropriate form. Then, information was coded to analyze and build the themes. Figures, tables, and a thematic analysis were created for the final report using the best-represented narratives based on the quantitative data that was gathered.

3. Results and Discussion

Destination and reason for migration

Sampang Rais from the Phedi, Khartamchha, Patheka and Baspani, the northern part of

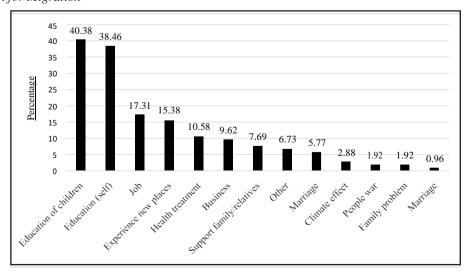
Khotang district, migrated to Sunsari, Morang, Jhapa, Kathmandu Valley and Udaypur districts. Kathmandu valley comprises the geographical areas of three districts namely Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Presently, the most preferred destination for rural-to-urban migration of Sampang Rais is the Kathmandu Valley. These migrants reside in Kapan, Pepsikola and Baneshwor areas of the Kathmandu district. Similarly, numerous Sampang migrants are found in the Thaiba, Harisiddhi, Sanagaun, Sunakothi, Nakhipot and Imadol areas of the Lalitpur district and small numbers in Suryabinayak area of Bhaktapur district. In an earlier time during the 1990s, migrants from retired British Gurkha armies from Sampang Rais migrated to Kathmandu Valley but now the trend has changed and all types of families are involved in the migration. Retired British Army, Tulasi Sampang (62 years) said:

My family arrived in the Kathmandu Valley in 1990, but we began residing permanently in Lalitpur in 1992. We only knew Sampang people from the British Gurkha Army throughout the 1990s, but over time, Sampang individuals from non-army families started to come for education and employment.

This study found that 44.23% of Sampang Rai migrants moved to the Kathmandu Valley with household heads, while other household heads are either back in their communities or have migrated elsewhere for employment as foreign labourers.

The prevalent reasons for rural-to-urban migration in Nepal are poverty, unemployment, the harsh effects of climate change, conflict, insecurity, political instability, marital issues, the expectations of young people, disasters, and the search for job opportunities in cities and industrial areas to seek a better quality of life (Jaquet et al., 2016; Thapa et al., 2019; Schwilch et al., 2017; Rai & Dangal, 2021). Likewise, the top five predominant reasons for rural to urban migration of Sampang Rais were mentioned children's education, personal education (self), job opportunities, experiencing new places/city life and health treatment. Additionally, migration of Sampang Rais is caused by marriage, trade, family support, people's war, familial troubles, climate effects and slower development activities in the place of origin.

Figure 1
Reason for Migration



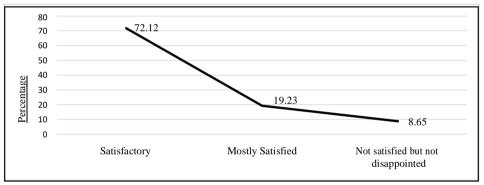
Moreover, the reasons for choosing Kathmandu Valley as the destination of migration are the already established networks, wider scope of employment, more options for educational institutions, a suitable climate, a bigger city and a choice of children. The nature of the migration is divided into temporary migration (59.62%) and permanent migration (40.38%). This also indicates that though 44.23% of families migrated with a household head all are not migrated permanently.

Benefits and challenges of the migration

The study has disclosed that the migrants provided a better education to their children than in their place of origin (75%), gained new skills/experiences (36.54%), found job opportunities (30.77%) and accessed good health facilities (27.88%). Likewise, when migrants were inquired that 96.15% agreed that there are more economic opportunities in Kathmandu Valley than in their places of origin.

Figure 2

Current Migration Satisfaction



Interestingly, majority of the families have met their expectations from the migration fully and partially. Migrants also mentioned that they face several challenges especially they worry most about the family in the origin and miss their origin place (56.73%), and find difficulty in assimilating with the host community (43.27%), navigating the travel in the city (40.38%), find a house in rent or build temporary houses (30.77%), language and communication barrier (27%) and loneliness (24.04%). Further, they face emotional challenges especially worry about their future carrier (72.12%), stress (55.77%), feeling of going back to their origin-place (35.58%) and health issues because of living in Tin-made (CGI Sheets) houses. Earlier migrants felt helpless and hopeless in the new place as they do not have a trusted family to share their difficulties. One of the respondents, Dhan Kumari Sampang (45 years) describes:

My family was an earlier migrant in Kathmandu, there were no such close friends and families to ask for help even though we had to purchase rice bags on credit from the shopkeeper who was known by our daughter.

Moreover, migrants failed to choose the right and suitable places for them within Kathmandu Valley, struggle to finance their adjustment process at the beginning, find less help from society and are not familiar with the facilities or services available in their destination.

Similarly, many of the migrants are not aware of basic financial literacy so there is no proper saving of their hard-earned money or invested properly by the left-behind family members. Migrants face challenges of communication because of the dispersed and disorganised families and those who did not do well here in their destination feel shame about going back to their village. There are improvements in the economy and education of the migrants but they also started forgetting their native language (mother tongue) and indigenous culture.

Role of networks in migration and decision process

The available networks will assist migrants in lowering costs, coordinating travel and providing support during the migration decision and process (Biswas & Mallick, 2021; Rai & Dangal, 2022). The network includes relatives, friends, experienced migrants, social institutions and religious communities. These various channels of the network helped to choose families to migrate and settle in Kathmandu Valley.

Network circle	Frequency	Percentage
Whole family	37	35.58
Relatives	51	49.04
Married siblings	32	30.4
Experienced migrants	11	10.58
Friends	10	9.62
Other	2	1.92

Table 1: Help and Support Providers for Migrant Families

These network players have provided information about the destination, travel arrangements, and job opportunities, find schools for the children and supported them in the adjustment process of the new migrants. The study shows that 65.38% of people dared to make final decisions for migration on their own, with the assistance of families (43.27%), parents (21.15%), and decisions made by seniors of the family (11.54%) and spouses (11.54%).

Jumlekha (Sampang Rai Confederation), Church and Heavenly Path religious group (known as Sewangmi) helped migrants to adjust in different ways. Jumlekha provides scholarships to students from the Sampang Rai community and supports them during emergencies and funeral rites. The scholarship support is extremely beneficial to families adjusting to a new location because the primary purpose of their migration is to provide education for their children. One of the respondents, Sangam Rai (44 years) mentioned:

Jumlekha provided scholarships for 75 students in the last year and assisted the people who were in need and the funeral ceremonies of the Sampang people.

Next, the church provided worship services to women, youth, and children, as well as prayer, an excursion programme, and temporary housing in the church for migrants. Prejana (28 years) shared:

Our faith community members visit families for prayers, listening each other during difficulties, support those who are going through a difficult time and organise events related to spirituality or women's day, children's day and hiking that make our affinity stronger and motivate

our stay here in Kathmandu Valley.

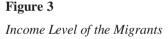
In addition, churches assisted in an adjustment process for the children by providing spiritual support, and extracurricular activities such as sports, drawings, quizzes, and life-skill training. Apart from the spiritual support, Heavenly Path group assists their followers by providing healing camps for the mind, body and soul and addressing emergency needs.

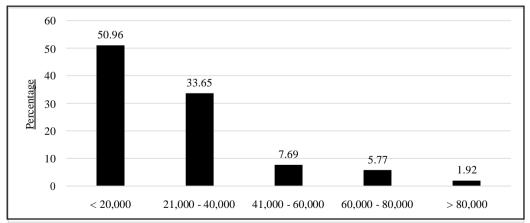
Settlement and socio-economic adjustment in the new destination

The first concern of migrants is to seek residence so that they can adjust socially in the new place. 62.5% of the migrants have taken one month to find rented rooms or relatives who can host them temporarily, and 23.08% of families required 3 months to build their Tin-made houses. It was also found that 28.46% of the migrants live within or close to their own socio-cultural cluster families.

In terms of land ownership, 64.42% of the migrants do not own land in Kathmandu Valley, and only 35.58% own a small housing plot. Those who are involved in agriculture have leased the land from the local landlord. Only 24.04% of the migrants were able to build houses for themselves on their land. The majority of the migrants, 38.46%, live in temporary Tin-made houses constructed on leased land for 3-5 years, 30.77% live in rented houses, and 6.73% live with friends and relatives with no rent cost. Similarly, 95.19% of respondents have a smartphone, whereas 31.73% have a refrigerator, 47.12% have a computer, 46.15% have a motorbike or scooter, and 7.69% have a car.

Majority of migrants work in the private sector, including agriculture, livestock, daily wage labour, small retail shops, and eateries, with only a small number working in the government sector. However, figure 3 shows that 50.96% of the respondents still earn less than 20,000 rupees per month.





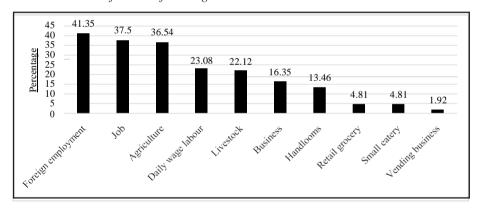
The migration of rural people to urban areas is an important livelihood strategy for poor families who want to increase their income while reducing their environmental risk (Adger et al.,

2015; IOM, 2020; Singh, 2019). Likewise, Sapkota (2018) argues that 62% of rural households migrate for work to earn more money and improve their living conditions, while the remaining 20% migrate because they are only employed seasonally in their homeland. The rest want to save money for social and cultural responsibilities. Migrant families diversify their livelihoods which is a process to increase income through various activities to improve the livelihood quality and well-being of the family (Rai & Dangal, 2022). Sampang Rai migrants have also diversified their livelihoods for economic adjustment by dividing available household skilled labour and using family networks.

Migrant households engage in various livelihood activities to meet their family needs for food, shelter, clothing, health treatment and education (see figure 4). 41.35% of rural-urban Sampang Rai migrants in the Kathmandu valley have sent family members to work abroad as foreign labour migrants. In the same way, 37.5% of the people work in the private sector, 36.54% work in agriculture, 22.12% rear livestock, and 23.08% work for a daily wage. In addition, 16.35% of migrants work in small businesses, such as retail stores, and 13.46% work from home in jobs related to handwoven goods arranged by the local garment factories. Among the migrants who participated in the study, 73 respondents (70.19%) said that their economic conditions improved after the migration while 29.81% reported that there are no such changes in their economic condition.

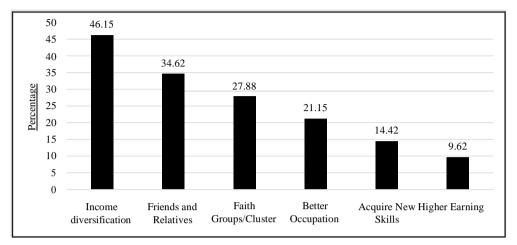
Figure 4

Livelihood Diversification of the Migrants



The adjustment of the migrants at the destination was supported by various factors, in which income diversification (46.15%) has played a vital role as a catalyst of the adjustment improvement process. They have become able to diversify their income by acquiring new vocational skills or enhancing existing skills which have helped them to navigate and to grab better employment opportunities in the market and it has yielded them higher earnings. Similarly, friends and relatives (34.62%) and religious groups/clusters (27.88%) have helped them with the adjustment process by providing temporary shelter, referrals and connections to establish the local network.





The labour exchange practice also helped migrants to adjust to the new location. 65.38% reported that they do labour exchange while constructing the houses, transfer of the residence goods and agriculture works among the relatives while 59.62% exchange labour with the neighbour from the local community people and other migrants.

Of the 104 respondents, 83.65% mentioned that they received physical resources (psychological support, encouragement, presence, house visit, prayer etc), 61.54% received material resources (money borrowing, housing support, goods support and sharing personal possessions) and 37.5% found socio-cultural support (sense of belonging within migrants and host community, information support, involvement in feast, festivals and rituals). Migrants have mentioned that they received support for their psychological well-being through house visits, encouragement, prayer and spiritual activities. 72.12% of the people who participated in the study said that they received help from their family and friends, while 26.92% reported receiving assistance for their mental health from their associated religious groups and other migrants.

The data show that majority of the migrants which is 82.69% have expressed their willingness to stay in touch as much as possible with their friends and family back at their place of origin. They are using occasions and festivals as an opportunity to meet with them. In addition, they are using phone calls, social media and visit exchanges to maintain the relationship with their friends, family and other migrants within Kathmandu Valley. However, the rest of the 17.31% of the respondents want to stay within the limited circle and do not initiate intentional meetings or contacts with other migrants.

Sampang Rai migrants also help other migrants in the adjustment process in Kathmandu Valley. 72.12% assisted others in finding a room, house, and land; 60.58% provided housing to newly arrived residents in Kathmandu; 35.58% assisted migrants members in finding jobs; and 33.65% assisted in connecting with religious communities and organizations such as a Church, Jumlekha, and Heavenly Path.

Maintaining linkages between migrants and left-behind family members

The road linkages with the Kathmandu Valley and access to phones and mobile data for travel and communication have made it possible to stay in touch between the migrants and left-behind family members in the village. Migrants from Kathmandu Valley communicate with their families via phone and social media. They also visit family members in the village during holidays, cultural ceremonies, busy times for farming, and emergencies. Sampang Rai migrants want to keep in touch with the people who stay in the village, so they send gifts for family members and support for village events, ceremonies and rituals. This will help in maintaining an unbroken affinity and harmony with the place of origin.

Furthermore, when asked how the migrants contribute, 70.19% said they share their knowledge, experience, and skills with others; 45.19% travel back to the village and take part in development activities; 39.42% give to charitable causes, and 34.62% remit money to their family members who still reside in the village.

In exchange, left-behind family members send food produced in the village to their migrated family members in Kathmandu Valley. They have also supported the cost and the materials related to the migration of their family members and sent money to the migrated persons who needed education, food and rent house.

4. Conclusion

The socioeconomic adjustment of the migrants is the process of adapting to the new environment in the host place, which includes the process, challenges, and possibilities of the adjustment. This field study was conducted in Kathmandu Valley, among Sampang Rai migrants. The reasons for Sampang Rai's migration to Kathmandu Valley are education, wider job opportunities, learning new skills, a suitable climate, and experience of city life and marriage. Majority of the migrants are satisfied with their expectations of migration and accept that their destination offers better facilities and wider economic opportunities. The study has revealed that the network of a family, such as relatives, friends, institutions, and religious groups, has played a major role in the adjustment of the migrants to their destination by providing information, travel arrangements, transitional shelter, and material and socio-cultural resources. Income diversification, skill enhancement, scholarships and support from institutions and religious groups have helped migrants' socioeconomic adjustment process. Likewise, migrants also prefer to stay in touch with the left behind family members and networks. Therefore, migrants participate in various social and ritual activities which have helped them to maintain the relationship between their origin and destination place.

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