CHAPTER- 2

NATURE AND PATTERN OF MIGRATION

Introduction

Before examining the nature and pattern of population migration from India to Nepal, it will be useful to highlight some of the Nepali scholars’ view on the wave of migration of different racial groups that moved into Nepal at different periods of history. This is important because migration of people into Nepal is a controversial subject. Pradyumna Karan writes of migration of people into Nepal in the ancient times in the following lines:

Nepal apparently was populated mainly by large scale of migration, over a period of many centuries, from all the surrounding areas. The intermixture of Mongoloid groups from Tibet with Indo-Aryan people from northern India has gone for to break down homogeneity race, in the strict sense; on the other hand, the great variations of environment in this country of contrasts and the difficulty of communication between different regions have preserved distinctions of languages, cultures, and even physical characteristics between population groups.¹

Harka Gurung says on the subject thus:

The medieval history of the Himalayan region is wrought with the fluctuations of Mongoloid and Khasa dominance. The most notable phases being the seventh century ‘golden-age’ of Tibet when Stron-Btsan Sgampo extended his empire to the Himalayan foothills, the 12th century occupation of western Tibet by Khasa rulers of Jumla, and 18th century expansion of the Gorkhas from Kangra to Sikkim. The inhabitation of Nepal Himalayas therefore was the outcome of successive migration of Mongoloid groups from the north-east and the Caucasoid people from the south-west. Nepal is also the meeting ground of northern Lamaism and southern Brahminism though most

of the tribal groups still cling to the Shamanistic Jhankri cult of mediums and sorcerers. The impact of the Hindu rules over the last few centuries has been progressive ‘sanskritization’, and the establishment of Indo-Aryan as the lingua franca of the Kingdom.²

Still worth considering is Mahesh Chandra Regmi’s opinion, though it echoes the opinions mentioned above. Regmi writes that:

The Kingdom of Nepal has been a meeting ground for diverse peoples and cultures through the centuries. The dominant strains in Nepal’s population are Caucasoid and Mongoloid, with varying degrees of admixture. Some of these ethnic groups were immigrants from east as part of the westward movement of tribal peoples from south-eastern Asia. Other group originated in Tibet, whereas still other moved in from the Indian plains or eastward from the hill areas of the western Himalayas.³

From the above lines of Gurung, Karan and Regmi, it is clear that people of different ethnic groups moved into Nepal from all the directions. Among them, two racial groups, namely, Caucasoid and Mongoloid are the dominant immigrants. Here, our focus is on the Caucasoid group, who had migrated from the plains of India. The Caucasoid composed of two groups - the Hill Indo-Nepalese and the Plains Indo-Nepalese as defined earlier in chapter I.

Migration from the present territory of India to present Nepal can be broadly divided into three phases, namely, (1) Pre-unification of Nepal (12th to 18th century); (2) Nepal under Shah and Rana periods (1769-1950); (3) Post-Rana period (1950 till date). The division of phases covers long time-frames. This is done partly for the convenience of the present study and partly because they

demarcate some landmarks in the history of Nepal’s political developments. This division also serves to a certain extent, the composition of the immigrants in terms of their social characteristic, the nature of migration and their subsequent status in the socio-political and economic structure of Nepal. However, irrespective of the division, the major causes of migration were political, religious, economic and social in nature. The early immigrants were pre-dominantly of high caste Hindus - Brahmins and Kshatriyas. While, in the second and third phases, people of the lower strata formed the dominant immigrant population.

Pre-unification of Nepal (12th to 18th Century)

Migration of people from the present territory of India to present Nepal during this period may be called early Indo-Aryan immigrants. Before discussing the nature and composition of the early immigrants, it should be pointed out that the southern region of contemporary Nepal and the northern region of present India was ruled by many different kingdoms, at times, by southern kingdoms and at other times by northern kingdoms and in other times forming small independent kingdoms.4

However, the present study limits itself from debating on the controversy and takes a simple line by assuming that any people who moved out from the

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Dor Bahadur Bista writes of the history of Tarai thus, ‘The Tarai has something of an independent history in ancient times, although the kingdoms which arose there have connections both with Gangetic plains and Nepali hills. Lumbini, Kapilavastu, and Devdah were all important sites in the west, and Janakpur was important in the east. Kapilavastu was an important early Buddhist centre associated with Gautama. These early kingdoms were decimated by disease and largely reforested until Simaraungarh was founded near the former site of Janakpur. Simaraungarh was later destroyed by the Moslems in the fourteenth century and the region was again naturally reforested.’ See Dor Bahadur Bista, Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1999), p. 19. Also see Hari Bansh Jha, Nepal-India Border Relations (Kathmandu: Centre for Economic and Technical Studies, 1995).

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territory of present India into present Nepal formed Indo-Aryan immigrants or Indo-Nepalese of this period, for the simple fact that their cultural and ancestral origin is from the present territory of India. Furthermore, the size of Indo-Aryan immigrants and the exact time of migration are not known. The only agreement among scholars is that a large scale of migration of Indo-Aryans from northern India to Nepal took place during this period as the following paragraphs show.

Here, we have taken 12th century as the beginning of this early period because most of the historians agree that it was during this time onwards that large-scale immigrants from India moved into Nepal to take refuge from the Afghan invasions from Central Asia. Since the 12th century, Afghans had invaded the kingdoms in northern India several times and conquered most of the kingdoms. This led to many Brahmins and Kshatriyas to seek refuge in the isolated western hills of Nepal. B.H. Hodgson observes that ‘... from the twelfth century downward, the tide of Mussulman conquest and bigotry continued to sweep multitudes of the Brahmans of the plains from Hindustan into the proximate hill, which now compose the western territories of the kingdom of Nepal.’

Hodgson further asserts that ‘the progress of Islam’ in India led to ‘fresh refugees’ pouring into the hills of Nepal. Although there is no evidence of

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5 However, migration from India to Nepal had existed even before the invasion of the Afghans. V. B. S. Kansakar points out that ‘before the Muslims invasion in India, migration from India to Nepal was confined to the kings, nobles and their attendants’. V. B. S. Kansakar, ‘Indo-Nepal Migration: Problems and Prospects’, Contribution to Nepalese Studies, Vol. II, no. 2, April 1984, p. 49.


8 Ibid., p. 38.
whether the immigrants encompassed all sections of population, according to Kansakar, migration 'encompassed large section of Indian population who took refuge in Nepal to avoid proselytization into Islam as well as political persecution'. The Shah rulers came in the 14th century from Chittor (Udaipur) in what is now a district in Indian state of Rajasthan.

With their arrival in Nepal, a process of assimilation followed. The arriving 'Brahmans soon located themselves. They found the natives illiterate and almost without a creed, proud, and fierce. To confirm the influence derived from their own learning, they determined to convert these Parbattiahs to Hinduism.' The impact of the immigrants on social structure and religion in Nepali society was perhaps the most major consequence. Kansakar writes of the impact in the following lines:

With the introduction of the caste system and conversation into Hinduism, the immigrants from India greatly affected the social structure of the Buddhists and the indigenous aborigines population observing animism. Prior to the introduction of the new code law, the social and religious structures of Nepal were largely Buddhist and partly Brahminical.

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9 Kansakar, n. 6, p. 49.
12 Kansakar, n. 6, p. 49.
The Indo-Aryans were apparently ‘more numerous and culturally superior to the indigenous people.’ As a result, they ‘brought under their control the chieftains of the tribes of this region’. Mostly Mongoloid groups of Magar and Gurung communities were then gradually assimilated into the new political structure. Kansaker put this process of settlement of ‘refugees’ in Nepal in the following words:

The intruding refugees were mostly Hindus and were in such a large number that they encroached upon the fertile lands of the indigenous populations such as Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Jirel, etc., and drove them to the slopes of the hills.

There was also intermingling of the Indo-Aryan immigrants and the local Khas and other Mongoloid groups. The descendants of such mixed marriages called themselves as Khatris or Chhetris. With regard to land-ownership, ‘the newcomers acquired land-ownership rights under a statutory form of landownership.’

To summarize, the nature of migration of the early Indo-Aryans immigrants was political and religious, marked by ‘forced’ migration. The political upheavals in India and the progress of a new religion - Islam - were the primary causes of migration. In regard to socio-economic status of the early immigrants, they were composed of the high caste Hindus – Brahmans and rulers – Rajput Kshatriyas.

14 M. C. Regmi, n. 3, pp. 6-7.
15 Kansakar, n. 6, p. 49.
16 See B. H. Hodgson, n. 8, p. 37.
17 M. C. Regmi, n. 3, pp. 87-88.
Another feature of migration during this period was the settlement of the emigrants in the hill region. The size of this early immigrant is not known. However, as noted earlier, this movement of people apparently involved large numbers.

**Nepal under Shah and Rana Period (1769-1950)**

This period covers the migration from India to Nepal after the unification of Nepal in 1769 and before the overthrow of the Rana autocracy in 1950. During this period several factors were responsible for migration from India to Nepal. The role of governments in India and Nepal during this period was an important factor.

British government in India was responsible for both decrease and increase of migration of population from India to Nepal. The British government in India ‘stopped immigration of Indians into Nepal’ who sought shelter against political persecutions, excepting the refuge of Nana Sahab, one of the leaders of the Mutiny of 1857, and the widow of King Ranjit Singh of Punjab and Nawab Wazir Ali Shah of Oudh.\(^{18}\)

In Nepal, Gurkhali rulers also followed the kings of Palpa, Makwanpur, and Bijayapur who tried to reclaim the Tarai forest for cultivation through the ‘Indian immigrants’ after the unifications.\(^{19}\) However, according to Durga P, Ojha, settlement of population before the unification and expansion of Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha between 1769-1780 A.D, the rulers of the

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\(^{18}\) Kansakar, n. 6, p. 50.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
principalities that controlled the dense forest and sparsely populated territories of the Tarai discouraged settlement 'because of their value as a defensive barrier'.

William Kirkpatrick, who represented the British Mission to Nepal in 1793, describes the forest of Tarai as a 'great forest' of eight and one-half miles wide covering the Tarai and with very few settlements with the eastern Tarai somewhat more populace than the western Tarai that had almost inexhaustible forests. The few settlements of the Tarai, described by Kirkpatrick supports Ojha's argument that the Tarai forest served as a defensive barrier and even if the rulers of Tarai principalities encouraged settlements from India, not many seem to have moved till the late eighteenth century when Kirkpatrick went to Nepal.

Soon after the unification of Nepal, the situation changed 'when the Tarai became the most prized acquisition of the Gorkhali rulers, partly because of its existing land revenues, royalty from timber exports, levies on pastures, and the export of elephant, but it was even more valued because of the large tracts of undeveloped rich cultivable land'. Thus, 'deliberate land settlement' in the Nepal Tarai began in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and continued even after the stop of the territorial expansion process following the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16.

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22 Ojha, n. 21, p. 23.
23 Ibid.
The settlement policies of both the Shah and Rana regimes had encouraged migration of people from India to the Tarai region of Nepal during this period. The economic potential of the Tarai region, encouraged the Shah rulers to settle its subjects in the Tarai to enhance the state revenue.\textsuperscript{24} Initially, 'government tried to reclaim waste lands directly through forced labour'\textsuperscript{25} and encouraged the \textit{Paharis} (hill residents) to migrate to the Tarai plains for settlement. One of the aims of this policy was to achieve '\textit{paharization}' of the Tarai. However, the hill people were reluctant to migrate because of the 'harsh climatic environment' – hot, malarial infected and dense forest.\textsuperscript{26} This led the Nepali government to 'actively pursued a policy of encouraging Indian immigrants into Tarai for settlement'\textsuperscript{27} and adopt 'indirect methods'.\textsuperscript{28} The government allotted wastelands to 'Indian immigrants' for reclamation through the local administration. For this purpose, \textit{Jimidars} (revenue collectors) were often instructed to settle a specific number of immigrants each year.

Furthermore, \textit{Birta}\textsuperscript{29} and \textit{Jagir} landholders were also allowed to settle 'Indian immigrants' and were rewarded for the efforts with additional wastelands.\textsuperscript{30} Towards the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, King Rana Bahadur Shah issued

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\textsuperscript{25} Ojha, n. 21, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{26} Shrestha, n. 25, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ojha, n. 21, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Birta} landholders were those who were granted tax-free lands, primarily because of religious, economic and political factors.
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a new land resettlement policy that stated Nepal’s desire to attract migrants from India to develop cultivation in the Tarai. This has lured ‘Indian immigrants’ from Bihar who suffered from severe land shortages and the aftermath of a serious famine in the late 1760s and early 1870s.\(^{31}\) After the Anglo-Nepal war in 1814-16, the government stopped ‘direct and concerted efforts for land settlement’.\(^{32}\) However, settlements were still encouraged through ‘indirect measures such as remission of tax, amnesty to runaway slaves, debtors and criminals, and exemption from compulsory labour obligation’.\(^{33}\) In the areas of Kailali and Kanchanpur, there were no restrictions\(^{34}\) for ‘criminals crossing over from Indian territory and settling on new land’.

When the Ranas came to power in 1846, they continued the traditional policy of encouraging settlement of people in the Tarai region. However, the Ranas also confronted the difficulty in attracting the hill people on a large scale. Hence, because of the reluctance of the hill people to migrate, the Rana government adopted liberal immigration policy. As Mahesh Chandra Regmi observes:

The Rana government continued the traditional policy of encouraging immigration from the adjoining areas of northern India also. Any Indian who moved into Nepali territory along with his family was given a free allotment of agricultural land, in addition to a home-site, and free supply of building materials. Such immigrants were even eligible for appointments as Jimidars, although preference was naturally given to settlers from the hill areas of Nepal.\(^{35}\)

\(^{31}\) Shrestha, n. 25, pp. 172-173.
\(^{32}\) Ojha, n. 21, p. 25.
\(^{33}\) Ibid.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.
\(^{35}\) Quoted in Shrestha, n. 25, p. 175.
During the 18th century, the British government in India introduced new land tenure system in India known as the ‘permanent settlement’. This system was introduced in the adjoining provinces of Bengal and Bihar in 1793, which aggravated the actual cultivators’ lives as landownership rights were vested in zamindars while the actual cultivators were recognized as tenants. As a result, many poor peasants from Bengal and Bihar migrated to Tarai where landownership opportunities were offered by the Rana government in Nepal. Nanda R. Shrestha points out that ‘[g]iven this situation, the landownership opportunities offered by the Rana government in the Tarai was a blessing, a very attractive alternative to disenchanted Bengali and Bihari peasants. However, there is no data to show how many ‘Indian immigrants’ crossed the border and settled in the Tarai. Hence, it can only be said that there was migration from India to Nepal and ‘available evidence indicates that settlers did come from India in (considerably) large numbers.38

During the mid-nineteenth century, when relations between the British government in India and the Nepal had improved, the Nepali rulers encouraged clearance of the Tarai jungle for cultivation. Between 1890s and 1930s, the Ranas encouraged the settlement in the mid-western Tarai districts of Nawalparasi, Rupandehi and Kapilavustu, where ‘zamindars, most of them Indians, were given title to large land holdings which they parceled out to tenants, also mostly Indians,

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Quoted in Ibid.
for clearing and farming at rental rates low enough to attract the tenants’. In 1857, when the Indian Mutiny erupted against the British rule in India, Nepal ruler, Jung Bahadur Rana assisted the British in quelling the revolt. A number of ‘Indians’ fled to Nepal to seek shelter. According to Ram Niwas Pandey:

After the suppression of the revolt a large number of revolutionaries of India came to Nepal and requested the Prime Minister for asylum which they were earnestly given. Jung Bahadur, however, assured the East India Company that there would be no threat of any kind to them on account of the asylum given to the Indian refugees in Nepal.

It was in recognition of that assistance, the British government, under a treaty concluded on the 1st November, 1860, restored to Nepal the tract of territory on the Oudh frontier which had been ceded to British government in 1816'. This was a case of how the region and the people of this region were sometimes under the rule of southern rulers and sometimes under the control of the northern rulers.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Jung Bahadur Rana made the first legal code that allowed foreigners to buy land in Nepal and also permitted Indian traders to conduct business at specific points in the Tarai. Kansakar points out that:

Realising the possibility of reclaiming the Tarai through immigrants from India, Jung Bahadur made provision in the first legal code of the country entitling the alienation of land through sale or purchase to the foreign nationals residing in Nepal. Since then the reclamation of the Tarai forest for cultivation started in immigration of the Indian from Bihar and United Provinces in a large number.

41 Ram Niwas Pandey, ‘Historical Perspectives of Nepal India Border Relations’, in H. B. Jha, n. 4, p. 21
42 Kansakar, n. 6, p. 51; Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Some Bengali teachers from India went to Nepal to impart education to the Rana families. Further, during the Rana period, 'initially most of the technical manpower needed for running schools, colleges, hospitals, hydro-electric installation, water supply, ropeway and railway, came from India'.\textsuperscript{44} Because of the liberal policy of the government and the shortage of manpower of this period, 'another wave of Hindu and Muslim migrants from the adjoining areas of India entered the Tarai area of Nepal, where today, along with such indigenous communities as the Tharus, they form the bulk of the population'.\textsuperscript{45}

The liberal policy of the Rana government, however, changed by the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. During the 1920s, the Nepali government banned purchase of land by 'Indians'. Under the new scheme, 'as opposed to the past schemes of attracting Indian immigrants, Hill people were to be specifically settled in the delineated areas'.\textsuperscript{46} This was because there was increased migration from the hill to the Tarai. The Nepali government was worried about the impact of 'Indian immigrants' in the Tarai and hence the restrictions were taken 'to counteract the cumulative effect of unrestricted immigration in the past on the ethnic composition of the population'.\textsuperscript{47} However, no ban was imposed on immigration.

This suggests that the Rana rulers had taken some measures to curb the flow of 'Indian immigrants', considering the domestic effects on the one hand and the

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Rose, n. 40, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{46} Ojha, n. 21, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{47} Regmi, n. 3, pp. 109-110.
external political impact on the other. It may be mentioned here that the political developments in India during the 1920s, particularly the India Civil Disobedience Movement launched in 1920 had a great impact on the Rana rulers in regard to the ‘Indian immigrants’ in the Tarai. The Ranas feared that if revolutionary ideologies get spilled over to Nepal side of the Tarai, it could be dangerous to their rule as the Tarai settlers were mostly of ‘Indian origin’ and their loyalty to the Nepali government was unconvinced. This attitude of the Ranas towards loyalty of the ‘Indian immigrants’ is important for later analysis.

During the early 20th century, some population from India migrated to Nepal to embark on trade in the Tarai and Kathmandu Valley. The limited developmental activities and the opening of few educational institutions in Kathmandu also encouraged ‘Indians’ to migrate to Nepal. Furthermore, the signing of British India’s treaty with Nepal in 1923 opened fresh avenues for the migration of Indian traders, entrepreneurs, skilled and unskilled labourers to the Nepal Tarai and other parts of the kingdom. Subsequently, Indian traders and businessmen, particularly the Marwaris, extended their businesses in Nepal and began to migrate to Nepal. A few people from Sikh community have also been migrating to Nepal; most of them were ‘refugees from Punjab who moved in from Uttar Pradesh in India’.

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48 Shrestha, n. 25, p. 176.
50 Ibid.
To sum up, unlike the first phase of migration to Nepal, in which migration was primarily political and religious in nature, the nature of ‘Indian’ migration to Nepal in the second phase were factors other than political and religious. The major causes of migration during the second phase were varied in nature: from economic, governmental policies, demographic to ecological factors. During the first phase, majority of the immigrants were from high socio-economic status whereas in the second phase, the dominant group of immigrants were from low caste and economically lower strata. The majority were the peasants from north India and the settlement was mainly in the Tarai region. Like the first phase, the size of the Indian immigrants is not known.

Post-Rana period (After 1950)

The overthrow of the Rana oligarchic rule and the initiation of the democratic process in 1950-51 were followed by a process of modernization and developmental activities in the Kingdom. The infrastructural development that started through the assistance of foreign aids that flowed into Nepal from India and the United States also opened up new opportunities of trade, commerce and employment. Subsequently a large scale of Indians migrated to Nepal to take up works in these activities.52

The Treaty of Peace and Friendship that was signed between India and Nepal in 1950 further emboldened migration to Nepal. The treaty made it obligatory on the part of the two governments to accord equal treatment to the

52 Ibid.
nationals of one country in the territory of the other. Articles that specifically
deals with inter state migration of the treaty are:

Article VI of the Treaty states:

Each government undertakes, in token of the neighbourly friendship
between India and Nepal to give to the nationals of the other, in its
territory, national treatment with regard to participation in industrial
and economic development of such territory and to the grant of
concessions and contrasts relating to such development.

Article VII of the Treaty further states that:

The government of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal
basis, to the national of one country in the territory of the other, the
same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property,
participation in trade and commerce, movement and privileges of a
similar nature.\(^{53}\)

The governmental agreements further encouraged migration from both the
countries in search of job and better business opportunities. During the 1960s and
70s, according to Frederick H. Gaige, majority of the migrants in the Tarai were of
'plains origin' with 59 percent of the total population of Tarai and 35 percent were
of 'hill origin'.\(^{54}\) Although from Gaige's definition of 'Plain people' - those
people 'who speak plains languages' (Hindi, Urdu, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bangali,
Marwari, including the dialects spoken by the tribal groups of the Tarai) 'as their
mother tongues or first languages' - it is difficult to say how many of the 'plains
origin' migrants were composed of 'migrants' from India after 1947.

Gaige further asserts that in the Tarai districts of Jhapa and Kapilavastu, the
migrants were distributed evenly between migrants of the 'hills origin' and 'plains

\(^{53}\) See Appendix II in Verinder Grover, ed., *Encyclopedia of SAARC Nations* (New Delhi: Deep and

\(^{54}\) Gaige, n. 41, p. 73.
origin’. Majority of the ‘plains origin’ migrants were concentrated in the districts of Bara and Mahottari-Dhanusha with 71 percent and 97 percent respectively. As a result of the open border between the two countries and the shortage of skilled labour force in Nepal, many people from the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had migrated to Nepal ‘not only to find work but also to settle.’ As a result, the number of ‘Indians’ in the local urban economies had increased.

Exact figures of the number of Indo-Nepalese and Indian migrants in Nepal are difficult to ascertain. According to figures given by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 1980, there were 3.8 million ‘people of Indian origin’ in Nepal. Of this about 2,388,000 have acquired Nepal citizenship.

As it has been pointed out earlier in the first chapter that distinguishing a person’s nationality is a complex exercise in the context of the people in the Tarai because of the similarities among the people living in border areas. Hence, census enumerators rely only on the answers of the respondents on their nationality without any verification. Many scholars have expressed their doubt on the accuracy of the Nepal’s census data. V. B. S. Kansakar points out that ‘the census data of Nepal on international migration is characterized by unreliability and

55 Gaige, n. 41, p. 73
57 Ibid.
inconsistency, due primarily to the sensitivity of international migration. Moreover, as a result of the growing xenophobia, the immigrants have the tendency of revealing their true identity.\textsuperscript{59} Bal Kumar K.C. comments that:

The 1952/54 census, collected information on 36 languages but only 24 languages were tabulated. The 1961 census, collected information on 52 languages but presented tabulation of only 36 languages. The 1971 and 1981 censuses collected information on only 17 and 18 languages by lumping the speakers of other languages in other or other/unstated category. This discrepancy in tabulating data on religion and language was due to distortion in identifying a language from a dialect. Secondly, the 1952/54 and 1961 census (were conducted by) open-ended question on mother tongue, whereas the two latter censuses had pre-coded question on only major languages. Thirdly, several kinds of response biases could have cropped up in identifying the correct mother tongue because of attrition from one language to another, particularly Nepali, because of it being an official language and largely used throughout the school system in Nepal.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite these limitations, the census record provides rough estimate of the number of Indo-Nepalese and Indians in Nepal. Before examining the census data, it seems proper to point out some of the factors that this study takes into account while analyzing the census data. First, this study uses the census records as an indication and not as an absolute data. Secondly, here we include all the ethnic and caste groups as defined in the first chapter to mean the Indo-Nepalese. Thirdly, Indians here include Indian-migrants or the category under ‘foreigners’ in the census data.


The distribution of population by mother tongue of the Hindu-caste groups, Muslims, some tribal groups mostly of the Tarai region are provided in the table below from the 1952/54 to 2001 censuses of Nepal. This, however, does not in any way suggest that the number of the Indo-Nepalese is accurate. The table shows an indication of the number of Indo-Nepalese for two reasons. First, the census records provides for mother tongue of population since the 1952/54 census. Secondly, mother tongue as a category of identifying a person is more reliable than other categories because while identifying a persons nationality there are difficulty for the enumerator, who depends totally on the person’s response without any verification. The record of a person by mother tongue escapes such possibility as the enumerator can also know what language the person speak. Harka Gurung observes that:

The number of those with Indo-Aryan languages of tarai of Indian origin has also increased considerably. The largest group among these – Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Tharu – totalled a population of 2.2 million in 1952/54. They had increased to 4.9 million by 1991, with their overall rate of growth slightly higher than the national average. Except for Maithili, which already had a large population base, speakers of Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Tharu mother tongues increased by 5.4, 5.0 and 2.8 times respectively during 1952/54-1991. The main reason for this increased has been substantial migration from neighbouring regions in India into the Nepal Tarai. This is also substantiated by the large increase in the number of those with other mother tongues of Indian origin. Population increase in the number of those with other increase of some of these were as follows: Santali, 15.8, Urdu, 6.2 times; Marwari, 3.9 times; Bengali, 2.9 times; Rajbansi, 2.4 times; and Hindi, 2.2 times.61

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61 Harka Gurung, n. 52, p. 5.
Table 1: Distribution of Population by Mother tongues of the Indo-Nepalese, 1952-2001

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<td>Santali</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10645</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>3193</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satar</td>
<td>16751</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>18840</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>20660</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriya</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,995,489</td>
<td>24.23</td>
<td>2,275,654</td>
<td>24.17</td>
<td>2,529,649</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foreign-Born Population

According to the 1961 census of Nepal (see Table 2 below), the first data on international migration, recorded a total of 337,620 foreign-born population in Nepal. The 1971 census recorded 337,448. The figure went down marginally in the 1981 census to 234,039. In 1991, the number of foreign-born population increased to a figure of 439,844. India-born population constituted an overwhelming proportion of the foreign-born population with 96 percent in Nepal in 1961, 95.6 percent in 1971, 95 percent in 1981 and 95.3 percent in 1991. According to Kansakar, 'there seems to be no reasonable explanation for the decline in the number of India-born populations living in Nepal in 1971 and 1981. It is possible that the decline can be attribute to (the) sensitivity of international migration'.

The above table reveals that the proportion of female is much higher than that of the male. In 1971, among the India-born, 65 percent was females in 1971 and in 1991, 72.2 were females. This indicates large-scale marriage of Indians to Nepal. On their distribution by region, the Tarai had 92.3 percent of the total foreign born and 98.9 percent of these were born in India in 1961. In 1971, 94.8 percent of the total India-born population was concentrated in the Tarai region. According to Bal Kumar, by 1991, over 80 percent of all foreign-born population had obtained Nepali citizenship.

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62 Kansakar, n. 60, p. 5.
63 Bal Kumar K.C., International Migration in Nepal: A Situational Analysis (Kathmandu, CDPS, Tribhuvan University, 1998), Table 3, p. 4.
64 Kansakar, n. 6, p. 57.
65 Bal Kumar K.C., n. 64, p. 4.
Table 2
Foreign-born Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>% of total foreign-born</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>324,159</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>322,718</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (-)</td>
<td>Female (-)</td>
<td>Female (35)</td>
<td>Female (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13461</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>14730</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>337,620</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>337,448</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indian Citizens in Nepal

The data for Indian citizens in Nepal are available since the 1961 census. The censuses data in the table below reveals huge fluctuation in the data of Indian citizens in Nepal. The 1961 census recorded a total of 76,311 Indian citizens in Nepal and it increased to 128,819 in 1971. But in 1981, it went down to 116,775 and further declined drastically to 68,489 in 1991. The 2001 census recorded a huge increase of Indian citizens to 102,468.

According to Kansakar, the decline of the Indian citizens between 1981-91 was 'in no way tenable, except mis-reporting by large proportion of the Indian citizens as Nepali citizens'. He explains that 'the data on religious composition of the population under the category of Islam clearly reveals the mis-reporting. The respondents stating that their religion as Islam was 399,197 persons in 1981, which increased to 653,218 in 1991. This marks an increase of 254,021 persons or 63.6 percent over a decade. This clearly indicates mis-reporting of the true nationality by the immigrants'.

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66 Kansakar, n. 60, p. 5.
### Table 3

**Indian Citizens in Nepal, 1961-91**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>76,311</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>128,829</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>116,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>33750</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>7648</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>366264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110,061</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>136,477</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>483,019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures for total industrial workers and immigrant workers engaged in manufacturing industries show that immigrants workers comprised 26.3, 19.0 and 19.4% of total industrial workers in 1972/73, 1976/77 and 1981/82, respectively. According to Pitamber Sharma, ‘the absolute decline in the number of immigrant workers between 1972/73 and 1976/77 is most likely an artifact of naturalization legitimately or otherwise.' Of the total immigrants in Nepal, according to a report of the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 1986-87 around 70 percent males and 90 percent females originate from India.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>116,755</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>68,489</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>-48,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>7,678</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6,395</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-1,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others/Unstated</td>
<td>358,586</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>15,543</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>-343,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>483,019</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>90,427</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-392,592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Harka Gurung, the number of Indian citizens in Nepal had not decreased but instead increased during the period of 1981-91 in the Kathmandu

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68 Ibid.
valley by 57.5 percent.\textsuperscript{70} Gurung argues that the reason for the reduction of Indian citizens in Nepal was because a large number of Indian citizens have acquired Nepali citizenship. For instance, the largest reduction in the number of Indian citizens was in Jhapa (8154) and Morang (5061) where more citizenship certificates 256,257 and 288,897 respectively were distributed.\textsuperscript{71}

The above discussion on census data is not clear on the number of Indo-Nepalese of Nepal. The census data also seem to be misleading, which can be seen from the untenable fluctuations. However, the census data do provide some rough estimate of the population of Indo-Nepalese. If we were to deduct the total number of the Indian citizens with the total number of the population by mother tongue of the Indo-Nepalese as provided in the censuses data, one delineates the figure of Indo-Nepalese at 2.1 million in 1961; 2.4 in 1971; 3.0 in 1981; 4.4 in 1991 and 5.4 in 2001 (see table 5 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Nepalese by mother tongue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Citizens</td>
<td>2,275,654</td>
<td>2,529,649</td>
<td>3,133,047</td>
<td>4,482,576</td>
<td>5,570,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Nepalese</td>
<td>-2,199,343</td>
<td>-2,400,820</td>
<td>-3,016,292</td>
<td>-4,414,087</td>
<td>-5,467,533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: See Table 1 and Table 3 above.

\textsuperscript{70} Gurung, n. 59, p.21.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
From the above table, arguably, the Indian Government’s claim in 1980 that there was 3.8 million ‘people of Indian origin’ in Nepal is a bit higher than the figure of 1981 derived in the above table.

The above table also reveals the decadal growth of the population of the Indo-Nepalese. Between 1961-70, the growth was 2,01477 and between 1971-81 it was 6,15473. There was a significant increase of 1,397795 between 1981-91. The growth between 1991-2001 also increased drastically with 1,053446. Although there are no evidences to show the high population growth among the Indo-Nepalese between 1981-91 and 1991-2001, one cannot rule out the possibility of Indian citizens disguised as Indo-Nepalese while censuses were conducted.

‘Push’ and ‘Pull’ Factors:

From the above discussion, we have seen that over successive periods, large scale migration from India to Nepal had taken place. It may be noted here that migration between India and Nepal was not a one-way process. Throughout the history there was also a large-scale emigration from Nepal into India. The principal causes and motivations that had compelled migration from India to Nepal in all the three phases of migration identified earlier are political, religious and economic factors. For the present study, ‘push’ factors includes those factors that compelled people to migrate from India and settle in Nepal. on the other hand, the ‘pull’ factors are those that had encouraged or attracted people to Nepal. In the migration of

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72 For a discussion on Nepali migration to India see Kansakar, n. 6; also see Dilli Ram Dahal and Chaitanya Mishra, ‘Nepali Emigrants in India’, CNAS Forum: Current Issue Series (Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, 1987).
population from India to Nepal both push and pull factors have played an important role. They are as follows:

**Political factors**

During the early migration since the 12th century, political unrest in India due to the Afghan invasion was a major push factor responsible for large-scale immigration. Isolation and forested hills of Nepal were considered safe place for shelter for fear of political persecution. Hence, it can be considered a pull factor for refuge. During the British rule, migration from India to Nepal continued for political factors. As it has been noted earlier that several rulers from India migrated to Nepal for asylum and after the Revolt of 1957 in India many ‘Indians’ migrated to Nepal to escape from prosecution. The political changes in Nepal after 1950 had also attracted people from India to Nepal. The good relation between India and Nepal in the 1950s and the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950 also encouraged people to migrate to Nepal.

**Governmental policies**

An important pull factor was the encouragement of ‘Indian’ settlements in the Tarai region by different regimes in Nepal. Both the Shah and the Rana regimes in Nepal not only encouraged ‘Indian’ settlement in the Tarai but also were given free

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73 Shrestha, n. 14, p. 134; also see Upreti, n. 50, p. 83.
74 B. C. Upreti is of the view that migration from India to Nepal for political reasons had reduced during British rule in India. Upreti, n. 50, p. 83.
land (Birta) to those who undertook the development of wasteland for cultivation. This played a vital role in attracting 'immigrants' from the densely populated northern states of India. The British government's land tenure system in the 1920s was a push factor for the peasants to move into Nepal. Furthermore, the governmental treaties between India and Nepal that allowed inter-state migration also encouraged people to migrate into Nepal. This factor still plays an important role in migration of Indians to Nepal.

**Demographic and Ecological Factors**

The scantly populated Tarai region of Nepal adjoining the densely populated districts of Indian states was another major cause of migration. A comparison of population density of the Tarai with that of the adjoining districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh of India reveals that the densities of north Indian districts were many times higher. According to the 1981 Census of Nepal, the population density of the Tarai districts ranges from 80 persons per sq. km. (Kailali) to 366 persons per sq. km. (Dhanusha), with an overall average of 254 persons per sq. km. On the other hand, even the 1971 census of India shows that only two among the Gangetic plains districts had a density of less than 250 persons per sq. km. (Kheri and Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh). Some districts such as Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Saram,

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76 Ibid., p. 87.
etc. had a density of over 600 persons per sq. km.\textsuperscript{77} This suggests that scarcity of land and great pressure on the agricultural land was a push factor for the peasant migrants.

Besides the demographic factor there was also ecological factors behind Indian migration to Nepal. Although the Tarai region was a malaria-infected area until the 1950s, the frequent natural calamities faced by the adjoining Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh such as floods, famines, drought, etc. were also significant factors for migration. As a result, people were forced to migrate northward into the Nepal Tarai.\textsuperscript{78} Here, the famine in Bihar in 18\textsuperscript{th} century may be cited as an example.

**Economic Factor**

The economic factor has been a major reason behind Indian migration to Nepal. The economic opportunities in Nepal have been a 'green pasture' for the Indian traders, businessmen, industrialists, professionals and the skilled and unskilled labourers. Many have migrated to Nepal not only to seek employment but also to increase their income.\textsuperscript{79} The establishment of industries in the Tarai since 1930s and the lack of required skilled and semi-skilled local manpower for industries in the Tarai provided employment opportunities to the migrants from North India.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 87, also see Gaige, n. 41, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{78} Upreti, n. 50, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{79} Upreti, n. 50, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{80} Subedi, n. 76, p. 86.
encouraged Indian businessmen to migrate to Nepal. For instance, the deliberate incentive such as export vouchers schemes of Nepal was bait for Indian businessmen.

Socio-Cultural Factor

One of the important causes of migration from India to Nepal has been the shared socio-cultural practice. Majority of the population of Nepal and India share a common religion. The social organisation, caste structure, rituals, cultural traits, religion and language of the majority of the Nepalese are similar to those of the Indians. They observe common festivals and visit temples and religious shrines in both the countries. There are considerable ethnic similarities among the people of India and Nepal, though this similarity is region-specific. The majority of the Tarai people are similar in their physical appearance and social behaviour with the people of the north Indian plains. These commonalities have encouraged migration of the people on both sides. Infact, migration has followed these religious and cultural lines.\(^{81}\)

Furthermore, both the national languages of Nepal and India – Nepali and Hindi, respectively have their origin in Sanskrit and share the same script Devnagari. Many languages and dialects that are spoken along the border are similar. For example, languages such as Awadhi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Kumoani of North India, are also spoken on the other side of the border in Nepal.

\(^{81}\) Subedi, n. 76, pp. 88-89; also see Upreti, n. 46, pp. 83-84.
These similarities of languages had also created problems for the Tarai people as they are treated as ‘Indians’.

The close social and language commonalities, marital relations between Indians of the northern districts and the Tarai people form a strong feature in this region. Also the Shah-Rana family marital ties with India’s various princely houses such as the Sindhis of Gwalor, Dr. Karan Singh, and many others in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Dehra Dun. A number of Nepalese living in India also get Indian matrimonial partners. Many Hindus and Muslims in Nepal are of ‘immigrants’ from India. These families tend to maintain ties to their ancestral villages. Hence, it is these commonalities and ties that make ‘many Indians consider Nepal to be their second home’. Besides, Nepal has been considered a safer place in terms of communal tensions.

Geographical Factor

Last but not the least important factor is the geographical proximity of Nepal and India. The Tarai region is an extension of the Indo-Gangetic plains. The concentration of the Indo-Nepalese and ‘Indians’ in the Tarai region suggests that proximity is an important factor determining migration pattern between India and Nepal. Furthermore, the similar environmental conditions of the Tarai region and

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82 Subedi, n. 76, p. 90.
83 Upreti, n. 50, p. 84.
84 Subedi, n. 76, p. 91.
the north Indian plains has also encouraged people to migrate from adjoining districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to a familiar environment of the Tarai areas.85

Socio-Economic Background

'Indian migrants' have moved into Nepal from every corner of India. While a large number of people have migrated from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, particularly from the border – districts, followed by West Bengal, Rajasthan, Haryana, etc. Fewer people have migrated from the north-eastern states, Maharashtra, Gujarat, etc.86

In terms of caste and communal characteristics, majority of the 'Indian immigrants' are Hindus and Muslims of the low caste groups.87 Most of these lower castes come from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.88 In terms of economic background, majority of the 'Indian immigrants' belong to the low-income group from rural background.89 Hence, migration of a large population takes place from rural to urban areas. But higher income groups, particularly professionals and businessmen from urban places also form a high number.

Spatial Distribution and Economic Status

'Indian immigrants' are distributed, by and large, on the basis of their occupation. Majority of the 'Indian immigrants' are concentrated in the Tarai region. This is

85 Ibid.
86 Upreti, n. 50, p. 85.
87 Gaige, n. 41, p. 740.
89 Upreti, n. 50, p. 86.
because of various factors, namely, affinities of the people on the border districts; the easy accessibility due to geographical proximity and open border; and the economic opportunities offered by the Tarai region.\textsuperscript{90} Topographically, the number of ‘Indian migrants’ tends to move lesser as the sea level increases. For example, only 0.07 per cent of the ‘Indians migrants’ have settled in the mountains and in the hills, they constitute 0.12 percent of the total population. Their largest concentration is in the plains of Tarai, where they constitute about 3.25 percent of the total population. See district-wise distribution of the Indo-Nepalese by mother tongue in Chapter 3 Table 1.

‘Indian migrants’ have embarked on various types of occupation. On the basis of economic status and occupation, the ‘Indian migrants’ can be divided into four occupational groups.\textsuperscript{91} Majority of the ‘Indian migrants’ belong to the low income and agriculture related migrants. Among the ‘Indian migrants’ 4.42 percent consists of males and 7.20 percent females in the urban areas and 20.45 percent females in the rural areas are engaged in agriculture.\textsuperscript{92} ‘Indians immigrants’ not only work but also own the agricultural land.

A large segment of this group is composed of the industrial workers both skilled and semi-skilled. Majority of them are employed as barbers, dry cleaners, tailors, hawkers, cobblers, etc.\textsuperscript{93} In some industries, such as carpet and garment in

\textsuperscript{90} Muni, n. 89, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{91} Muni, n. 89, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{92} Upreti, n. 50, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{93} Muni, n. 89, p. 82.
Kathmandu valley, majority of the labour force are comprised of ‘Indian migrants’. 94

The second occupation group may be called non-agricultural – related migrants. This group includes industrialists, traders and shopkeepers, travel and transport agents, etc. 95 In this sector, both the high income and the high caste migrants are engaged. 96 Here, the Marwaris business community is the most influential section due to their business skills and resources. 97 Mostly 30 to 38 percent of the males and 2.97 percent of the females in urban areas, and 15.51 percent of the males and 1.14 percent of the females in the rural areas are engaged in business and commerce. 98 A large section of ‘Indian migrants’ have established stainless steel, textile, sugar, cement, and garment manufacturing industries.

The third group of ‘Indian migrants’ is professionals both skilled and semi-skilled. This includes engineers, teachers, medical doctors, media persons and government servants. 99

The fourth group of ‘Indians’ includes those priests and religious preachers. 100 Majority of these are Hindu sadhus who perform religious rituals in the temples.

94 Upreti, n. 50, p. 90.
95 Muni, n. 89, p. 82.
96 Upreti, n. 50, p. 88
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., p. 89.
99 Muni, n. 89, p. 83.
100 Ibid.
Conclusion

The above discussion clearly shows that migration of people from India to Nepal has been a continuous process from the past and has been considered a 'natural phenomenon'. The most important factors responsible for migration of people from India to Nepal have been identified as political, economic, demographic, geographical, socio-cultural affinities, governmental policies, and ecological causes. The different phases of migration have composed of different socio-economic characteristics of the 'migrants'. The number of the Indo-Nepalese and Indian citizens has been controversial. The censuses data also show no tenable figure.