

## **Exploring the Effects of Labour Migration on Class Relation in a Rural Village of Western Hill of Nepal**

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*This study examines the profound effects of labour migration on the social structure of a rural community in western Nepal, with a particular emphasis on changes in land ownership and labour relations. Based on the fieldwork carried out in two phases in 2011 and 2022, this study delves into the multifaceted changes taken place in the study area as a consequence of international labour migration. The results reveal the rural households use migration as a strategy to diversify their livelihoods and enhance economic conditions and social status in the village through the financial gains (remittance) from working abroad. The effects of remittances on land ownership system is apparent, as they enable transfers from former landowners to migrant households. The research also identifies changes in traditional labour organization and sharecropping, which are ascribed to the*

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*fragmentation of land ownership and the increasing inclination of young individuals towards off-farm employment. The successful migrant households utilize remittances to attain economic and political influence, which ultimately contributes to challenge traditional social hierarchies and rural power structure. This results in changes to social classes and initiates interrelated changes in community credit system, labour organizations, land use practices, and political power structures. This study concludes by highlighting the multifaceted nature of social transformations in the rural village, positioning labour migration as an important factor contributing to bring about those changes.*

[**Keywords** : Labour migration, Remittance, Village, Land ownership, Labour relation]

## **1. Introduction**

In Nepal, foreign labour migration has grown tremendously over the last three decades and is one of the key contributors to the country's GDP. The contribution of remittance to the GDP of 2022 was 22%. The labour migration of Nepali citizens has been driven by multiple factors like poverty, lack of employment opportunities at home, conflict and other social, environmental and political factors, and the demand for skilled and low-skilled migrant workers coupled with the offer of higher wages in the countries of destination. Tracing the age-long history of migration in Nepal, Sinjapati and Limbu (2017) find a fragmented migration sector in Nepal where government agencies were not seen as leaders in the field but instead perceived to be heavily influenced by the private sector during the policy-making process, bringing their regulatory role into question.<sup>1</sup> According to the preliminary findings of the 2021 Census, there are more than 2.1 million Nepali citizens living outside the country, a figure that represents 7.4 per cent of the national population (CBS 2022)<sup>2</sup>.

The Labour Migration for Employment: Status Report 2008-2022 shows shreds of evidence that between 2008/09 and 2021/22, more than 4.7 million new labour approvals were issued to Nepali migrants wanting to work abroad. These numbers increased consistently, reaching a peak in 2013/14 when more than half a million new approvals were issued. The years thereafter saw a decline in the number of workers seeking new approvals. Overall, though, the number of workers who received labor approvals remained more or less comparable at the 500,000- 600,000 range per year.<sup>3</sup> Nepal Labor Migration Report 2022 posts a very concise picture of migration trends :

Graph-1 : New Labour Approval Issued by Year



Source : Nepal Labour Migration Report 2022.

The labour approval reached the lowest level since 2008 in 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the virus spread across the globe, countries implemented lockdowns, cancelled or halted flights, and restricted the entry of foreign citizens, resulting in an almost complete halt in mobility. In the year 2021/22, we again see that the increment of the labour approval significantly where the proportion of women has been close to 10 per cent. Nearly all migrant workers from Nepal are young adults and from the economically most productive age group of 18 to 44 with half between the ages of 25 and 34 years in the three reference years. The median age of migrant workers was just 28.<sup>4</sup>

Nepalese have been migrating to several countries for employment. The Government of Nepal has approved 111 countries for labour migration through recruitment agencies albeit with temporary restrictions applicable in the case of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries-Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-and Malaysia host the vast majority of Nepali migrant workers. These seven countries have consistently been employing more than 80 per cent of Nepali migrant workers since 2013/14, and are also the countries from where Nepali workers receive the highest demand (for detailed information see Nepal Labour Migration Reports 2020, 2022). The data on labour approvals disaggregated by province and district for the years 2019/20-2021/22 shows that the highest number of migrant workers hailed from Province 1 and Madhesh, with each accounting for more than one-fifth of the total. The number of labour approvals issued for migrant workers from

Karnali and Sudurpaschim is quite low. Madhesh province, above 98 per cent for all three years. This proportion is particularly lower for Bagmati and Gandaki with these two provinces showing higher diversity in terms of countries of destination. Dhanusha, Jhapa, Siraha, Morang and Mahottari are the top five districts from where Nepali migrant workers originated in 2019/20 and 2020/21 with Sarlahi replacing Morang in 2021/22.

The labour migration has become a significant factor in influencing socio-economic structures, particularly in areas typified by traditional agricultural economies, in the present global landscape. The migration of young individuals from rural areas, motivated by economic inequalities, demographic pressures, and the forces of globalization, has profoundly transformed the social fabric. Although migrants fulfill the role of economic contributors by providing financial support to their family in their countries of origin, there is a scarcity of scholarly research examining the effects of this migration on the socio-economic structures of rural communities. In this context, this paper aims to elucidate the complex consequences of labour migration, with a specific focus on its influence on class dynamics within a rural community of western hill of Nepal. It illuminates the changing patterns of class relations, with a particular focus on the transformations in land ownership and labour dynamics that have arisen as a consequence of the influx of foreign labour migration.

## **2. Research Method and Study Area**

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to examine the intricate dynamics of labour migration and its influence on class relations in Narethanti of western Nepal. The Narethanti village, located inside the Galkot Municipality of Baglung, presents an important case study for analyzing the diverse consequences of international labour migration. The economic viability of the village is heavily dependent on the inflow of remittances from migrant workers, who primarily seek employment in Gulf countries, Japan, Korea, Australia, Portugal, and several other European nations.

The process of data gathering encompasses various methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observations, and key informant interviews employed during the course of a two-stage fieldwork, conducted in 2011 and 2022. Ethical considerations, such as the preservation of anonymity, obtaining informed permission,

and obtaining approval from an institutional review board, are fundamental elements of the research process. The following sections will provide a comprehensive examination of empirical data in order to shed light on the intricate impacts of labour migration on the structure of landownership and labour relations in the village.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

In the past, the ownership and utilization of land used to play a central role in shaping social status and livelihood opportunities of the households in Narethanti. However, this scenario has been changed because of the ever increasing trend of migration of people to foreign countries in search of employment opportunities. The economic well-being of the majority of households depends now on the income generated from remittances acquired from abroad. This circumstance adds intricacies to the process of determining the social position of households within the broader societal framework. It is crucial to reevaluate the prevailing belief that the Nepalese economy is mostly agrarian. It appears that remittances have replaced agricultural operations in rural communities as the primary source of income. In light of this transition, the current study investigates the dynamics of class interactions in Narethanti. In particular, it looks at a lot of things that affect relationships between classes, such as how much access or control households have over resources they need to survive, how people participate in the social organization of work, and how politically active and helpful households are to their communities. When we look at how international labour migration changes the dynamics of class, we have to look at how community families' access to, control over, and influence over economic, social, and political domains changes.

Within the historical framework of Narethanti village, predating the 1980s, there was a noticeable difference in the distribution of land ownership among households, with a special emphasis on the older population of the current era. It is important to note that a small number of households controlled sizable land holdings during this time period, which was characterized by a monopolistic concentration of political power. Consequently, people who were impoverished were required to participate in labour activities. In contrast, a significant proportion of households engage in cultivating small plots of land primarily for subsistence purposes in the realm of agricultural production. Even within this particular

category, there were variances observed in the length of sustenance, with some individuals able to sustain themselves for a period of nine months, while others were only capable of sustaining themselves for six or three months. Certain households were devoid of any land, save for the structures in which they resided. The dominant political structure, known as the Panchayati system, allocated local political power predominantly to individuals with significant land ownership. The aforementioned phenomenon enabled a favored minority to exert greater authority over land resources while also marginalizing other individuals. A respondent, now 80 years old, looks back on his youthful days and reflects upon his experiences :

Most of the households used to hold 15 to 30 ropani of land, which was sufficient for their subsistence. Some Dalit, Gharti, and Khatri households were landless, and some Kunwar, Magar, Vandari, and Karki households were big landowners there. Meanwhile, the government provided political power to these landowners at the local level. As a consequence, these households owned a chunk of land by using their authority. These households registered the ownership of their own land resources. The majority of dry and forest land was registered by the Mukhiya, and the irrigated land was registered by the Jimwals for their ownership.

The allocation of political power to influential landowners led to the perpetuation of disparities in land ownership across families. Individuals who have strong familial connections to governmental authorities were able to increase the size of their property holdings. Respondents said that powerful people registered large amounts of land in the names of family members or allies, taking advantage of the government's powers to partially register this land. As a result, numerous individuals were denied the chance to increase their holdings of land. According to Bom Magar...

During the implementation of the Panchayati system, individuals with large land rights, such as Mukhiya, Talukdar, Jimwal, and Pardhan, were entitled to partial rights to land registration; they registered a large amount of Khet, Bari, Pakha, and forest land for their relatives too. But the household, having no relationship with the political leadership, could not do so. Rather, some people lost their ownership in the process of the dispute with the power holders.



The disparity in the distribution of land and the resulting power dynamics had significant socio-political and economic consequences. This development led to the formation of distinct labour arrangements, characterized by negotiated agreements between landowners and persons lacking property or possessing minor landholdings. The last group, which needed extra food from farming, either worked on the owners' properties, borrowed land, or delivered an agreed-upon crop yield. In contrast, landowners, faced with the challenge of effectively overseeing their extensive properties, resorted to either hiring landless individuals or labourers or entering into mortgage agreements. This laid the groundwork for diverse labour relationships. Paul Khatri says :

Households with a large amount of land used to keep Hali plow land But there was no limitation to the work. Ploughman had to provide service for a whole year. The landowners used to keep Hali as contract labour, but if the lords needed extra labour, the family from the contractual labour had to work there. Sometimes, contractual labour is used to achieve small land for harvesting. Contractual labour is used to pay certain amounts for crops on an annual basis. In sharecropping, the sharecropper had to provide 50% of the crops to the landowner.

Historically, specifically during the implementation of the Panchayati system, there was a lack of motivation for community members to actively participate in the decision-making process. Despite their participation in public meetings or village councils, individuals refrained from expressing their concerns toward landlords due to limitations in time availability and a lack of political acumen. Individuals frequently participated in meetings, primarily as observers of their landlords. The aforementioned circumstance resulted in the perpetuation of an inequitable social dynamic between individuals who owned land or held positions of authority within the Panchayati system and the marginalized members of society. With a single political structure, Jabbar KC said that the landowners and Panchyati leadership effectively controlled the political situation in the village, which led to an authoritarian style of government. The villagers encountered difficulties in expressing their dissent towards decisions put forth and implemented by their leaders, despite sporadic gatherings for this purpose. Jabbar KC recalls the past :

The politics in the village were directly controlled by the landowners and Panchyati leadership in the village. As the

panchayat was a single-party political system, it did not encourage people to participate in decision-making. The Panchyati leaders were all-powerful in the village. Sometimes, villagers used to call in meetings, but they could not raise any voice against the proposals given and decisions made by leaders. Only a few educated people could oppose the Panches, the political leaders, indirectly. And the contractual labourers and mortgagers used to support their lords.

The existence of a class hierarchy was a direct result of the significant disparities in political power, land resources, and labour relationships. The rich class in this context consisted of landowners and Panchyati leaders, who held a position of dominance, while individuals with limited or no land ownership were relegated to a subordinate status. Because of this difference in power and property distribution, big landowners rose to the top of society, while people who did not own land or only owned small amounts of land fell to the bottom. The landowners in question can be understood, within the framework of Marxist theory, as occupying a position akin to that of the middle class. This particular social group had significant political influence and enjoyed a high level of social prestige. It is worth noting that those belonging to the lower caste were seldom in possession of land. Nevertheless, the elderly participants provided accounts of notable transformations in the allocation of economic resources, political influence, and the structure of labour organizations during their lifetimes. There are many reasons for these changes, such as the fact that there are more educational opportunities across the country, improvements in mass communication and information technology, people moving from rural to urban areas and abroad, and political upheavals in the past. Even though these factors are important for studying how classes work, this study only looks at the effects of international labour migration because of its specific limitations.

### **3.1 Change in Distribution of Ownership of Land Resources**

The Narethanti village has historical significance in terms of migration, as it experienced the commencement of this phenomenon during World War I. This occurred when British army agents, referred to as 'Galla', arrived in the village with the purpose of recruiting exceptional young individuals to contribute to the war effort. One participant, Ganja Bahadur Magar, who had served in



both World War I and World War II, decided to withdraw from the battlefield during the former conflict. However, he was subsequently recruited from Nautuana in India, fulfilled his military duties, and has since retired. A total of six individuals hailing from Narethanti enlisted in the British Army. Furthermore, a considerable number of young individuals have chosen to enlist in the Indian Army, a prevailing pattern.

Nevertheless, a significant proportion of migrant labourers originated from houses of lower-middle-class status within the rural community. The individuals in question chose enlistment in the military over seeking employment as temporary or salaried workers, primarily due to the unproductive nature of the village's land, out of a desire to improve their social standing and ensure long-term viability. According to Susta Bahadur Basnet, it was observed that the lahures (armies) enjoyed a significant level of reputation, hence rendering military employment an appealing choice. Individuals hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds effectively handled their trip expenditures by resorting to borrowing funds at exorbitant interest rates from landowners, giving rise to potential complications in the event of being denied enlistment in the military. His statement follows:

The migrant workers used to earn a lot of money. They wore beautiful clothes and brought jewels, tape recorders, and many other strange things, which were the means of attraction for those living in the village. Moreover, their soldierly bodies would attract young girls and junior boys. When bachelor youths (Lahures) came home on leave, the parents of many girls would be in line to marry their daughters. The local youths were inspired either to join the army or work in any sector in India.

This exemplifies the intention of young individuals to migrate in order to bring about a transformation in the lifestyle of their community through the financial gains obtained from outside employment. The analysis of the life trajectories of migrant households highlights the significant contribution of money from abroad to support the economic well-being of their rural communities. In addition to the allocation of funds towards consumer items, financial resources were also designated for child education, debt payments, and remittances. This allocation had a

notable effect on the transfer of property ownership, specifically from landowners to migrant households. According to Paul Khatri, it was seen that migrant households employed their earnings to acquire land from landowners in the village, resulting in an increase in their social status and a corresponding decrease in the status of the landlords. The following table shows more about this:

**Table-1 : Land Purchased with Remittance**

Type of land	Number of HH	Total %
Irrigated and Dry Land only in the village	4	22.22
Housing Land in only Local Market Areas	2	11.11
Land only in the Tarai Region	5	27.78
Land only in the Urban Areas	3	16.67
Land in the village and Urban or Tarai	4	22.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source :** Field Survey, 2011.

This table shows that out of the 30 migrant households, 18 of them, accounting for 60 percent, have utilized their earnings from abroad to get land, regardless of whether it is located in the village, urban region, or the Tarai region. In contrast, the remaining 12 households, comprising 40 percent of the total, have refrained from utilizing their revenue from abroad for the acquisition of land resources. Out of the 18 households that engaged in land investment, 4 (equivalent to 22.22 percent) obtained land within the village, while 2 (11.11 percent) exclusively acquired land in local market districts, and 5 (27.78 percent) entirely invested in metropolitan regions. Furthermore, it is worth noting that out of the total number of households surveyed, 3 houses, accounting for 16.67 percent, made land purchases specifically in urban areas. In addition, 4 households, representing 22.2 percent, acquired land in both village and urban or plain areas. It is worth mentioning that the remaining twelve households made the decision to abstain from acquiring land yet effectively managed to overcome sustenance and previous debt difficulties.

### **3.2 New Land Owners**

The ownership of land has experienced a gradual transition from prior proprietors to migrant households, which has been influenced by a range of factors associated with the migrants

themselves, including the countries they choose as their destination, their age, and their sources of income. It is worth mentioning that individuals who migrate to India demonstrate a greater inclination towards acquiring land in comparison to migrants relocating to other nations. Furthermore, it has been observed that elderly migrants have a higher inclination towards investing in properties located in rural villages, whilst their younger counterparts tend to display a preference for settling in the Tarai region or urban areas. Workers in developed countries such as Japan, Korea, Australia, America, and Europe, who make a monthly income exceeding one lakh Nepalese rupees, tend to primarily allocate their investments in metropolitan regions. The prioritization of debt repayment is observed among recent migrants in these nations.

Within the sample of 30 families that were examined, it was observed that there exists a lack of uniformity in terms of the sorts of nations to which they have access. There are a total of five homes that possess the privilege of accessing nations such as Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Singapore, where the monthly income surpasses one lakh Nepalese rupees. Two households, comprising individuals employed in Japan and the British army, have acquired real estate in the regions of Chitwan and Baglung. Within a span of five years after their move, a household consisting of three individuals who were employed in Japan and Singapore successfully obtained land in Kathmandu. Nevertheless, despite being employed for a duration of three years, two households comprising two individuals each, who are working in Japan and Australia, respectively, have not made any investments in real estate.

In the examination of land acquisition patterns, it has been seen that a total of 18 households have made investments in land. These investments are distributed as follows: 22.22 percent in the village, 11.11 percent in local market regions, and 27.78 percent in metropolitan areas. In addition, a proportion of 16.67% of individuals acquired land solely in urban regions, while 22.2% of respondents purchased land in both rural and urban or suburban areas. The remaining twelve households have successfully addressed their subsistence concerns and fulfilled their financial obligations without acquiring any additional land.

It is interesting to note that younger migrant workers really want to change their social class by buying homes in cities instead of

living in farming villages. Jivan Khatri's statement is an illustration of the sentiment :

I am working in Qatar. But I have not earned sufficient money because the salary is not good. I have to spend a large amount on household maintenance because there is no additional source of income. It is very difficult to purchase the increasing cost of consumer goods, child education, celebrating rituals and festivals, and health care. My parents would like to use money to buy land here, but I do not agree with them. I could not buy land now. Even if I could, I would not buy land in this village because there is no value in it. The village life is full of hardship... I have deposited a small amount of money in the bank and have supported some of my brother-in-law's plans to go to Japan. Now, I am also in the process of going to Japan so as to earn sufficient money and buy land in urban areas for the bright future of the children.

### **3-3 Land Dispossession**

According to the respondents, there is evidence suggesting that a specific group of individuals, namely former landowners and peasants, have voluntarily surrendered their authority over land. This trend is particularly prevalent among households that lack opportunities for engaging in non-agricultural endeavours, as they have chosen to sell their land. In contrast, businesses and households engaged in employment do not engage in the direct acquisition or loss of land. Instead, they focus on the expansion of their business activities. Landowners who exclusively depend on inherited property and subsistence farming are seeing a progressive erosion of their authority and control over land resources. According to Prem Pun, there is a transfer of land ownership from impoverished peasants and erstwhile landowners to migrant households. Out of the total of ten houses residing in the hamlet, a majority of seven homes (70 percent) have acquired land from previous landlords, whereas the remaining three households (30 percent) have obtained land from local peasants. The selling of property by former landowners can be attributed to their limited access to alternate sources of income. The mounting financial burdens related to ceremonial customs make it difficult for people to manage the rising cost of living.

These households engage in the sale of their land in order to acquire monetary resources for the purpose of acquiring consumer

items, financing the education of their children, obtaining healthcare services, and undertaking various rites and rituals. Households are compelled to surrender their land due to a variety of factors, including the increasing expenditures associated with child education, the high expenses of urban living, costly wedding ceremonies, traditional dowry customs, and unsuccessful endeavors in international migration.

Based on my preliminary observations, it was evident that landowners were motivated to sell their properties as a result of their ambitious lives or exceptional life circumstances. Nevertheless, during my most recent visit to the study area, I noticed that a sizable number of households show a willingness to give up their land in order to embrace an urban lifestyle. Certain affluent individuals, with the objective of broadening their business reach from local to urban regions, opt for land sales as a means of recourse following unsuccessful endeavors. Some individuals choose to sell their land in order to adopt an urban lifestyle, while others want to secure land in the Tarai region for the purpose of attaining comfort. Additionally, there are those who sell their land to finance their migration to foreign countries. Raj Bhandari's life history serves as an illustration of how financial restrictions, such as the burden of debt from international air travel, coupled with the exploitative practices of brokers, compel individuals to resort to land sales.

Raj was born and brought up as the youngest son in an economically well-off family. He passed the SLC from a private boarding school in Baglung and did his certificate level in Kathmandu. After finishing his formal education, he married a girl from Pokhara and went to Japan, spending 12 lakh rupees. But, within 3 months, he returned to Nepal when the hotel was closed there. After returning to Nepal, he stayed for 2 years in Kathmandu and tried to fly to America. But, in his second attempt, the agent ran away by taking 15 lakh rupees. His family sold all 45 ropanis of irrigated land to pay off the debt, but up until now, he has been in the process of migration again.

The above discussion highlights the importance of international migration for employment as a reliable non-agricultural career, functioning as a mechanism for obtaining land resources in one's country of origin. The phenomenon of labour migration has emerged as a viable alternative means of sustenance,

exerting a significant influence on the shift of land ownership from landlords and peasants to migrant workers. The transition observed, wherein landowners are replaced by peasants, is in accordance with the increasing social standing of households that have significant income derived from foreign sources. It is worth noting that migrant households, characterized by substantial affluence, pose a challenge to the prevailing authority of landowners, who have historically held sway over power, prestige, and property within the village.

Nevertheless, the steady shift away from land allocation has presented significant difficulties for lower-income households that do not have access to alternate sources of income. The increasing expenses associated with daily living have necessitated these households to either liquidate their property or get loans in order to maintain their means of subsistence. The alteration in the distribution of land has instigated a range of transformations in labour organizations, sharecropping arrangements, mortgage practices, and power dynamics within the village. These aspects will be examined in further detail in the following section. The life history of Dal Bahadur Pun serves as an interesting exemplification.

Dal Bahadur was brought up in a family where the father had worked as an attached labourer before. However, he joined the army in India when his family used to hold a small land, and his four brothers used to work as contract or wage labourers in the village. Pun did his full service, earned a large amount of money, paid off the past debt, and bought irrigated land and 15 ropanies of grassland from Mukhiya. After the separation from his family, he built a house and toilet, educated the children, and added nearly 15 hectare of unirrigated land from the same landowners. Including that, he bought 40 ropani of land from a single person, Mukhiya. According to Pun, being limited to farming, other brothers could not increase land. Now, the land is sufficient to sustain the food requirements for the whole family of 10 members. He is using the pension to fulfill household requirements, celebrate rituals and ceremonies, and hire labour. The deposited money and pension helped him manage the wedding ceremonies of two daughters and three sons. He has credited some money to his relatives, kin, and friends and deposited a small amount of money in the bank for further use. Now he is building a house for his oldest son with his own money. He said, "The employment in the Indian army



not only supported our living but also increased our land resources as well as our prestige in society.”

The life narrative of Dal Bahadur exemplifies the profound influence of overseas employment, particularly his tenure in the Indian army. In contrast to the usual pattern of limited land ownership and hard physical labour, Dal Bahadur broke away from it. His family history is linked to bonded labour. By virtue of his military service, he was able to generate a considerable income, settle outstanding obligations, and tactically engage in property acquisition, procuring irrigated and grassland areas from the local Mukhiya. Dal Bahadur’s endeavors went beyond basic subsistence as he augmented his holdings through the acquisition of additional land, resulting in a cumulative total of 40 ropani. The accumulation of resources enabled him to adequately fulfill the nutritional requirements of his family, which consisted of ten individuals. Furthermore, he employed his pension funds to cover domestic expenditures, engage in traditional customs and observances, and hire workers. The individual’s financial stability played a crucial role in facilitating several key life events, such as the weddings of two daughters and three sons. Additionally, this financial stability empowered the individual to provide financial support to both family and friends. The success story of Dal Bahadur highlights the multifaceted impact of foreign work, which not only provides a means of livelihood but also contributes to the enhancement of social status and economic resources within the community.

### **3.4 Change in Labour Organization**

The following types of work systems were common until the 1970s: Bethi (unpaid work done for lords and Panchyati leaders), Parma/Hudda/Mela (mutual labour exchange), Hali (work based on contracts), familial labour, and wage labour. The attached and free labour system has experienced a collapse, while other labour groups have continued to exist, albeit with noticeable changes in their characteristics.

### **3.5 Collapse of Attached and Corvée Labour**

The labour systems of attached work, free labour, and contractual labour persisted until the 1980s, albeit in a diminished state. According to the person, during that time period, certain households were providing services like Kamara/Kamari, Susare,

Vanse, Haruwa, and Charuwa to the former Malla king of Galkot state and other important landowners and Panchyati leaders in the area.

The Bethi system persisted until the 1980s, during which people were compelled to provide unpaid labour for Panchyati leaders or landlords. Nevertheless, this technique is no longer being implemented. Based on the observations made by KC and Sharma, it may be inferred that the demise of these labour systems had already commenced during the 1980s. The phenomenon of disintegration experienced a notable acceleration during the 1970s and reached its pinnacle in the 1990s. As a result, the conventional labour system experienced a decline during the 1990s, resulting in the liberation of households that were formerly tied to their landlords and the acquisition of land resources. Concurrently, the peasants discontinued offering their labour without payment. The respondents identified the political movement that occurred in Nepal in 1990 as a significant turning point that signaled the deterioration of labour connections or structures within the village. During the interviews, participants recounted their encounters with the free labour system, although none of them reported any associated work relationships during that particular period.

### **3.6 Transitioning from Conventional Contractual Labour Relationships**

The conventional structure of contractual labour arrangements, which played a crucial role in the upbringing of previous generations, entailed a mutual agreement between affluent landowners and households possessing limited or no land. One of the respondents, Bel Bahadur Kala, emphasized the historical backdrop in which landowners, who needed labour to oversee extensive land holdings, engaged in arrangements with households that sought year-round employment for their subsistence. The influence of social norms played a significant role in the widespread adoption of contractual labour arrangements. In his exposition, Krishnahari Upadhyaya explained how societal norms affect people's behaviour. He specifically talked about the common belief that Brahmins were not allowed to work in agriculture. This prevailing idea exerted significant pressure on individuals, regardless of their limited means, to resort to contractual labour as a means of subsistence. According to these agreements, workers made a commitment to engage in year-long labour in return for the provision

of food grains. Ganga Bahadur Pun highlighted the absence of predetermined land size or crop quantity as a basis for pay, as well as the absence of clearly defined working hours, which grants landowners discretionary power in determining salaries. According to Ganga Bahadur Pun's comment, there was frequently an unequal distribution of power, which limited the leverage of labourers.

I had to work for the whole year. When the lords called me for work, I had to attend. Sometimes, they used to call other family members for work, but there were no fixed wages. As a contractual labourer, I could not reject them. The wage tended to be determined on the basis of the property of the lords, but there was no exact value or price of work. Sometimes, the amount of wage used to be varied according to the nature of the lords. If the lords became sympathetic, I used to get a considerable amount of food grain.

The conventional mode of contractual labour is no longer observed inside the community. Among the sample of 30 families that were examined, it was seen that merely 6 households, constituting 20 percent of the total, had encountered contractual labour arrangements up until the previous decade. Moreover, subsequent interviews revealed that none of the households were presently involved in such labour partnerships. Respondents attribute the change to a variety of societal problems, with young people's reluctance to engage in traditional agricultural practices being a key factor. Krishna Bahadur Pun found an interesting pattern: younger people tend to prefer non-agricultural jobs overseas or in cities, which means that their main sources of income change. Consequently, households have become less reliant on feudal lords for their sustenance, and landowners, having relinquished their authority over substantial land holdings, no longer necessitate continuous work throughout the year. The findings of the survey reveal that a mere 5 houses, accounting for 16.67 percent of the total sample size of 30 households, currently possess land holdings ranging from 25 to 40 Ropanis. This stands in stark contrast to historical records, which suggest that certain households used to possess land holdings as extensive as 120 to 350 Ropanis. The reduction in land holdings results in the elimination of the necessity for contractual labour during the entirety of the year. The traditional form of contractual labour agreements in the village has been essentially terminated due to the rising trend of youngsters

transitioning to off-farm employment, with the issue of land fragmentation. Furthermore, the presence of daily wage labour and the emergence of novel contractual labour arrangements have played a significant role in the decline of the conventional system.

**Table-2 : Wage difference for different tasks in 1980s and in 2010**

Description of work	Wages (Crops in Pathi) and Cash (in NRS) in 1980s				Wage in 2010	
	Male		Female		Male	Female
	Crop	Cash	Crop	Cash	Cash	Cash
Manual work	1	5	0.5	2.50	250	100
Ploughing with oxen	2	10	—	—	650	—
Ploughing without oxen	1	5	—	—	350	—
Basket weaving	1	5	—	—	300	—
Mason	1.5	7	—	—	300	—
Wood Cutting	2.5	12.50	—	—	400	—
Carpentry	3	15	—	—	500	—

**Source :** Field Survey, 2011.

This table depicts the evolution of daily wage labour during the preceding three decades. During the 1980s, the prevailing practice was to remunerate workers primarily through the provision of agricultural produce, with monetary compensation being a rarity. As an illustration, individuals engaged in manual labour were compensated with varying amounts. A manual labourer was remunerated with 1 Pathi, equivalent to NRS 5. Similarly, a ploughman without oxen received 1 pathi, while a plowman with oxen received 2 pathi. A basket maker was compensated with 1 pathi, while a mason received 1.5 pathi. A carpenter's daily wage amounted to 3 Pathi, and a woodcutter received 2.5 Pathi for their job. In comparison, the prevailing rates stand at NRS 250 for an individual engaged in manual labour, NRS 300 for a skilled worker in masonry and plowing without the assistance of oxen, NRS 650 for a plowman utilizing oxen, NRS 350 for a professional basket maker,

NRS 400 for a woodcutter, and NRS 500 for a carpenter. Labourers are being given breakfast and lunch, although there has been a notable transition in the food offerings. Previously, homemade staples like bread, maize, and locally brewed millet alcohol were provided, but these have now been replaced with fast food options such as noodles and alcohol.

The respondents attribute the changes in daily wage work to the increased migration of young people for the purposes of education, training, business, and employment in urban areas and foreign countries. According to a distinguished participant named Man Singh Bhandari, migrant families were instrumental in introducing cash compensation for labour within the hamlet. The practice of remunerating workers in currency rather than in agricultural produce can be traced back to migrant labourers who earned wages while working in foreign countries. Over time, this practice exerted an influence on non-migrant households, leading them to also embrace the use of cash compensation for remunerative work. The emigration of the most industrious segment of the population has resulted in a deficiency of labour, hence augmenting the need for labour and its associated expenses within the community.

Labour migration has not only created a labour gap, but it has also made it easier for migrant households to become major employers because they own more land and make more money from working abroad. Man Singh Bhandari claims that this situation has had an impact on the demand for and cost of labour in the hamlet. The respondents have also observed that labour migration has had a significant impact on the bargaining power of labourers in deciding their salaries. Unlike in the past, when landowners set wages because there were so many unemployed young people, workers today have more power when it comes to negotiating wages. Individuals demonstrate a willingness to incur elevated labour expenses in order to ensure the prompt completion of tasks during periods of high demand.

Furthermore, the transition towards daily wage labour has emancipated previous contractual labourers from the discriminatory measures enforced by landlords. Dil Bahadur Khatri, a previous individual engaged in temporary labour, emphasized the demanding nature of the activities they were required to undertake within the previous framework while also acknowledging that the

remuneration received was inadequate for maintaining their means of subsistence. The termination of contractual labour relations confers advantages not only upon labourers but also upon small landowners and Brahmins with little land, as they are relieved of the responsibility of sustaining a contractual labourer for the duration of a whole year.

### **3.7 Emergence of New Forms of Contractual Labour**

The emergence of novel forms of contractual labour has become a significant phenomenon in contemporary society. The findings from interviews indicate that individuals are progressively turning to contract-based incentive labour. Although daily wage work continues to be widespread, Paul Khatri noted that the practice of hiring individuals may not be suitable in all circumstances. According to him, "hiring daily wage labour might be stressful for households lacking manpower to serve the worker for breakfast and lunch." In addition to Khatri, Kamala Rana said that she could not rest her mind while hiring wage labour. She further said that she has to be with him/her/them to make sure that the hiring labourer(s) is doing the work all right. But, as she had small children, neither she could go to the field nor be sure that everything was right in the field. In this context, both of them are using contractual labour in practice. If a labourer makes a mistake in the quality of the work, she is not required to pay the price of the labour-performed work. That is why they preferred to use contractual labour with the remittances earned abroad.

According to the respondents, the conventional yearly contractual labour arrangement exhibited a lack of predetermined work hours and tangible outcomes. In contrast, modern contractual agreements entail the determination of prices that are contingent upon the characteristics and projected labour demands of the undertaking. Instead of the traditional practice of signing contracts with feudal lords that lasted a whole year, modern work arrangements are more focused on specific lengths of employment, ranging from hourly to monthly contracts. This transition enables proprietors to circumvent the onus of year-long obligations by instead choosing fixed-price agreements. The respondents perceive this progress as a means of freeing owners from protracted commitments.

The shift from conventional to modern contractual labour arrangements is noteworthy, particularly within migrant households



that encounter a labour shortage. In households where male members are not present, contractual labour is employed to fill the gaps in the labour force for various jobs, including building, land leveling, wood cutting, and basket production. This strategy allows these households to make use of their existing financial resources. One of the former landowners and leaders, Chinta Bahadur Bhandari, compared his position in the past and at present :

In the past, Dalits and poor people used to come by asking for work, even for survival. Some of them used to come to borrow the Chhaupanje and return it with interest and labour for a whole day. Sometimes, they used to work free of charge, and we used to give them crops in return. To employ people as hali or wage labourers used to be a matter of pride and respect. The labourers used to respect us. They used to have food grains as wages. The wage used to be cheap. But now everything has changed. All the people tend to go abroad. They earn money and settle down in urban areas. They do not eat local products in the village. They buy rice to eat. They do not like to work hard in the village. Working a daily wage in the field is rare nowadays. Some workers are working in the village. But it is difficult to hire them because we have to treat them like sons-in-law. Neither it is affordable nor available in time. Therefore, we have to do the work ourselves. I am of old age, and I do everything in the field.

More and more people moving around has made things harder for older and female people in the village. The most productive workers are making money abroad, while the elderly are forced to work and need extra care. For women, this situation has made things more difficult. To deal with the lack of workers in both the village and the households, a plan is emerging that involves mortgages or free land distribution. We will talk more about this topic in the next part.

In short, the increase in job possibilities and lack of workers have made the demand for labour and wages higher, which is good for working conditions in the village. People who used to work on a contract basis and own land are now working for wages, which has changed the yearly contract work relationships in the village. Labour migration has changed the way upper-class landlords and foreign investors depend on contract workers. It has also changed the way people live, from farming in the village to working in factories in

another country. Labour migration has changed the lives of some families, moving lower-class migrant families into the middle class and middle-class families into the higher class. Even homes from the working class have moved up to a better class. Notably, people who used to own land and be in political power have to work because there aren't enough workers because more people are moving away. Balkrishna Bhandari's life story helps us to better understand the effects of the movement on labor relations in the village :

The Bhandari family has two sons. One works in the Indian army, and the other in Japan. They used to trade work in the past, following the rules of the mutual labour exchange. When they were planting and harvesting, family and friends would help for free. Before his kids joined the Indian army, he worked as a plowman on other people's land and got paid in grain. People who worked as plowmen before Bhandari were paid one "PATHI" (almost four KG) of grain per day. Besides that, he has worked as a plowman and has been paid one "PATHI" grain. People who were migrants used to get food grains as payment, but some families started giving cash instead. In this case, he said, "When non-migrant households paid us in food grains, we were interested in working for the British and Indian armies because they paid us in cash and brought us clothes and rum from abroad." There was a little more respect between us and the Lahure families than between other families because they needed workers more than anyone else and had worked on other people's lives. During this time, three of his sons were called up to serve in the Indian army, but he didn't stop hauling crops. But when their younger son moved to Japan, they told him not to work on other people's land because it would hurt their reputation. He didn't agree with his son and kept working, but when his two daughters-in-law and their husbands went to India, he sold an ox, shared it with someone else, and stopped working on other people's land. When his younger daughter-in-law moved to Kathmandu to send her kids to school, he sold another ox. The couple from Bhandari are now at home. For the time being, they can't work, so they have mortgaged most of the land. They are farming some land by hiring wage labour with money that his kids send from abroad. The land that his kids bought in Chitwan is now home to their families.

### 3-8 The End of Sharecropping

Adhiya, or “sharecropping”, was a common way for people in the village to own some land in their younger years. This is what the present elderly generation did. Older responders remember that some families owned a lot of land that they couldn’t take care of with just their family’s work. Others, who had smaller plots of land, had a hard time making ends meet. In these situations, landlords and peasants agreed to work together on farms, which is known as sharecropping. Dil Bahadur Khatri said that sharecropping was good for the lords because it gave them a 50/50 share without them having to work directly on the crops. It also dealt with worries about taking care of the land and keeping its fertility. For sharecroppers, working as a farmer wasn’t about weighing the pros and cons; it was a way to make ends meet when they didn’t have enough land or other ways to make money.

Respondents say that the drop in sharecropping in the village is due to big landowners’ land becoming more fragmented and small landowners becoming more interested in activities outside of farming. Nar Bahadur Khatri says that sharecropping was common when large landowners needed peasants to work their land and small peasants needed land to grow in order to make a living. But a big change in how land resources are shared and how people make a living has put an end to sharecropping in the village. Large landowners don’t have the money to make crop-sharing plans because they have sold or split up most of their land. At the same time, more and more young people from small farmer families are working off-farm to make money and improve their social standing. These big changes have made it possible for sharecropping to stop in the town. The following table shows how common sharecropping has been in the past and how common it is now:

**Table-3 : Patterns of Share Cropping**

Experience of Share Cropping	Number of households	%	Practicing now	Numbers of households	%
Having Land	8	26.67	Having	—	—
Giving Land	5	16.67	Giving	--	—
Having no experience	17	56.67	No practicing	30	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>			<b>30</b>	

**Source :** Field Survey, 2011.

The table shows that out of 30 families, 13 (43.24%) had done sharecropping before, but none of them do it now. Most of the families (17/667) had never been sharecroppers; 8 (26.67%) had been sharecroppers themselves; and 5 (16.67%) had given land to sharecroppers. The data makes it clear that sharecropping is becoming less common in the village.

Workers moving to other states to find work is what former sharecroppers say caused the practice to end. Since Dammer Nepali and Yam Pun's kids work abroad, they send money back to their families instead of sharecropping. After giving up sharecropping, Dil Bahadur Khatri said that he was making enough money from money sent back to his home country and from buying land with money earned abroad. Through remittances and foreign investments, he was able to move from struggling to make ends meet as a sharecropper to having a stable income.

A lot of people who answered also said that free land was a big reason why sharecropping stopped. What changes, though, is that people are becoming less interested in farming and more interested in things that don't involve farming. Because young people are leaving agriculture for jobs that aren't related to farming, there is a lack of workers. To avoid paying high wages for workers during planting and reaping, landowners offer their land for free. Surprisingly, households that don't move prefer wage work to free land because it gives them more freedom and better pay. This feeling is reflected in Bal Bahadur Sarki's words.

In the end, the decline of sharecropping in the village is due to changes in how people make a living, especially the movement of labour. The focus has moved from farming to jobs outside of farming, and this migration has also changed the relationship between landlords and tenants. Since sharecroppers no longer have to pay owners for land, they are no longer required to share half of the crops they grow with them. Even though they are no longer in sharecropping relationships, they now depend on money from other countries.

### **3.9 How Mortgage Needs are Changing**

Under the Bandhaki (mortgage) system, a renter gives the landowner a deposit of money and then owns the land until the deposit is returned. This system has changed over time. It is a popular way for village households to own some land. It used to

happen a lot, but things have changed a lot about how it works now. People who answered say that until about 20 years ago, both dry and wet lands were often mortgaged. However, dry land is not used in mortgages right now. According to Jhappat Bahadur Kunwar, irrigated land is still the best choice for mortgages because it is easier to farm and gives better results. Dry land use in mortgages, on the other hand, has stopped because it requires a lot of work and doesn't pay well.

According to Indra Prasad Sharma, the past use of mortgages on dry land was caused by a lack of households that owned land and a high demand from people who needed mortgage land to grow food. But in the last twenty years, the village economy has changed from farming to money sent back to the village. Since most families now get their money from remittances, mortgage systems are becoming less common. The mortgage patterns among studied households that were studied before and after migration are shown in the table below.

**Table-4 : Changing Patterns of Mortgaged Land**

Mortgage before migration	Number of households	Percentage	Practice of mortgage now	Numbers of households	Percentage
Having Land	8	26.67	Having	2	6.67
Giving Land	2	6.67	Giving	5	16.67
No experience	20	66.67	No practicing	23	76.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>			<b>30</b>	

**Source :** Field Study, 2011.

The data show that mortgages are becoming less common among migrant families over time. Out of 30 families, only 7 (23.34%) are in mortgage relationships right now, compared to 10 (33.34%) before the migration. Notably, migrant families are giving up mortgage practices after moving. At the moment, only 2 households (6.67%) mortgage other people's land. Before migration, 8 households (26.67%) did this. Also, 5 households (16.67%) have mortgages on their land, compared to 2 households (6.67%) before migration. The fact that fewer migrant families have mortgages and more of them own land shows that people in the village are switching

from having mortgages to owning land. There don't seem to be as many families with mortgaged land as there are with mortgaged land. Respondents say this change is due to a lack of workers and the money that migrant families get from living abroad, which makes them less dependent on farming. As a result, migrant families are slowly giving up using other people's land and choosing to mortgage their own.

Mortgage lenders say that only watered lands are mortgaged because they require less work, are easier to farm, and yield higher prices. Land is easier to get, either with debt or for free, because wealthy families are leaving their farms behind and moving to cities. Families that don't have enough workers are happy to let their land be farmed, but families that do have enough workers are hesitant because they won't get enough money back. People also don't harvest on other people's land, even if it's free, because the cost of work is so high. Even though there are problems, people have to mortgage or give away their land because they can't find workers at the right time during planting and reaping seasons and the work isn't very good. To sum up, migrant families often use mortgages to get around the high costs of finding work when there aren't enough workers.

The labour movement also helps people who used to have mortgages because it gives them another way to make money to live on. Migrant families that had mortgages before they moved no longer have to worry about how to make ends meet. More people are moving to cities, and fewer people are interested in living in the country. This leaves a labour shortage in the village, which leads poor families to sell land for little or no money. Hari Maya Khatri says that the mortgage has more power when negotiating the amount of money placed and the terms of the mortgaged land because there aren't enough workers in the village.

#### **4. Summary and Conclusion**

The objective of this study was to examine the changing class dynamics within migrant households that arise from adjustments in means of subsistence as a consequence of international labour migration. The study was carried out in the Narethanti village located in the Baglung district of western Nepal. It utilized various research methods, including in-depth interviews, household surveys, and key informant interviews, to acquire a comprehensive picture of the experiences of migrant workers and their families. The



study involved the active participation of 45 respondents from 30 households, each possessing unique characteristics. Its aim was to collect qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to the evolving patterns of land ownership and labour connections that arise as a consequence of foreign labour migration. Based on an extensive fieldwork, a number of significant results were derived, which are presented as follows:

The phenomenon of international labour migration has become a prominent means and strategies for households to diversify their livelihood, wherein decisions of foreign migration are frequently motivated by an aspiration to alter the socio-economic conditions of the village through the financial gains obtained from working abroad. The present study examines the impact of labour migration on class dynamics within a rural community located in the western region of Nepal. The findings shed light on the intricate interactions between economic, social, and political changes that result from this phenomenon.

Upon analyzing the life histories of migrant households, a noticeable change in the dynamics of land ownership becomes apparent. In addition to enabling the acquisition of consumer items and debt repayment, remittances play a substantial role in effecting a notable shift in property ownership, shifting it from previous landowners to migrant households. As a result, the class status of migrant households is elevated, leading to a proportional reduction in the class position of non-migrant households within the societal structure. The act of redistributing land initiates a series of interconnected transformations in labour organizations, land use systems, political power structures, and credit connections inside the community.

The phenomenon of labour migration has the potential to cause significant disruptions to conventional contractual and wage labour connections, as well as sharecropping agreements involving affluent households. The decline of sharecropping and traditional forms of contractual labour in the village can be attributed to two main factors: the fragmentation of landownership and the growing preference among the youth for off-farm employment. Novel contractual labour arrangements have arisen, enabling workers and landowners to engage in price negotiations that are contingent upon the specific characteristics and projected labour demands of the task

at hand. This innovative approach provides a heightened level of flexibility in terms of the duration of the engagement.

The social implications of migration become apparent when migrant households acquire and exercise power over high-quality land, political institutions, debts, and bank deposits, therefore threatening the established dominance of landowners and political elites. The acquisition of economic and political power by migrant households allows them to rise in the social hierarchy, leading to the displacement of previous landowners in terms of their influence and status.

Labour migration has a profound impact on agrarian populations at a worldwide level, as it leads to the formation of a global working class. This phenomenon involves individuals from diverse social groups in rural areas seeking employment opportunities abroad. This transition corresponds with Marx's theoretical framework of international labour solidarity in response to exploitative conditions, notwithstanding the ongoing challenge of achieving organizational cohesion. The phenomenon of global labour migration has the potential to undermine national boundaries, hence posing a possible challenge to the established capitalist framework.

The influence of remittances on the agrarian class structure is notable, since migrant households apply foreign money to augment land ownership and engage hired labour, so modifying the conventional land use patterns. Migrant households, who have now become landowners, endeavor to elevate their social status by reducing their own physical labour and instead depending on hired assistance, which stands in contrast to the traditional practice of relying on contractual labour by established landlords.

This study highlights the complex interplay between labour migration, remittances, and the establishment of a working class and class stratification. The arrival of foreign earnings expedites the process of class development in rural villages, as migrant households ascend to higher positions within the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, it also underscores the increasing reliance on remittances for the enhancement of economic, social, and political welfare.

In conclusion, this study argues that labour migration is not the exclusive catalyst for social transformation, but rather an essential component among other contributing factors. The research under-

scores the intricate ramifications of remittance economies, fostering a societal inclination towards migration and reliance on income from abroad. The intricate interplay between the evolving dynamics of class connections and the creation of a working class can be attributed to the pervasive influence of global capitalism. Labour migration has economic prospects, although it also presents challenges to established social structures and the principle of reciprocity within the village under investigation.

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