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### The Role of Labor Migration and Remittance in Changing Caste Relations in a Village of Western Nepal

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#### Abstract

This article explores the enduring impact of the caste system in Nepal and its changing dynamics because of the labor migration and remittances. The caste system has exerted a significant influence on social dynamics, societal roles, and disparities within Nepalese culture. Despite concerted efforts to address and mitigate caste-based prejudice, vestiges of this system persist and exert influence on several aspects of everyday existence. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in international labor migration, primarily influenced by many economic, social, and historical variables. Notably, the inflow of remittances has emerged as a crucial component in Nepal's economy. This study examines the impact of labor migration and

remittances on traditional caste positions, social interactions, and commensality regulations in a village of western Nepal, using fieldwork as the primary research method. This study utilizes qualitative data obtained from interviews conducted with migrant workers, households receiving remittances, and different caste communities. The purpose is to analyze the transformations in societal attitudes and behaviors concerning caste discrimination and inter-caste relationships. It underscores the importance of conducting a thorough and critical evaluation of the effects of labor migration and remittances in the context of challenging the caste system and promoting improved inter-caste interactions.

**Keywords:** Migration, Remittance, Western Nepal

#### Introduction

The caste system has been a deeply rooted social structure in Nepal for centuries, with strict rules and customs governing the social relations and interactions between different castes. The hierarchical system has resulted not only in different level of access to power, privileges and opportunities, but also in discrimination, marginalization, and oppression of people belonging to lower-castes. Nevertheless, there are several factors and forces that have contributed to bring about changes in traditional notions of caste hierarchy and inter-caste relations in Nepal. Based on the fieldwork carried out in a village of western Nepal, this study examines the role of labor migration and remittance on caste practices, and inter-caste relations. It aims to explore the extent to which these factors contribute to the shift in caste-based social structure in the study area.

The Nepalese caste system has had a significant impact on several aspects of the life of its population, encompassing social interactions and economic prospects. The caste system categorizes individuals into discrete castes, each characterized by its ascribed roles, rituals, and societal status. Despite the implementation of legislative and societal initiatives aimed at combating caste-based discrimination and fostering equality, remnants of this system persist, continuing to influence peoples' everyday lives.

The phenomenon of international labor migration has become increasingly prominent throughout the history of Nepal, driven by a multifaceted combination of economic, social, political and historical factors. A significant number of youth population from Nepal leave their county for overseas, particularly in labor-intensive industries, thereby contributing their labor to places that are undergoing rapid economic growth and development. The remittances sent back by these migrant workers to their families, has been a significant contribution to the overall economy of the nation. These remittances play a crucial role in reducing poverty, sustaining livelihoods, facilitating access to health and education, and fostering local development.

Within the framework of this ever-evolving societal milieu, the primary focus of this paper is to explore the ways in which labor migration and remittance have contributed to bring about changes in traditional roles, social interactions and commensality rules among different castes in the study area, and examine the extent to which these factors have influenced changes in social attitudes and practices related to caste discrimination and inter-caste relations. Additionally, it seeks to shed

light on the implications of these changes on the process of broader social transformation in rural villages of Nepal.

To achieve this goal, I draw on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with migrant workers, remittance recipient households, and members of various caste communities in the study area. This paper not only shed light on the potential of labor migration and remittance as drivers of change in the caste hierarchy and inter-caste relations but also provides insights into the broader implications of these factors for social and economic development in Nepal. Furthermore, it will contribute to the ongoing discussions on social change and development in Nepal, highlighting the need of critically examining the changes brought about by labor migration and remittance in challenging caste hierarchy and inter-caste relations in Nepal.

### **Labor Migration and Changing Nature of Caste System in Nepal: A Review**

The impact of international labor migration is often studied in linkage to the process of socioeconomic formation and transformation. Most of the literature on migration is focused on the economic aspects overlooking the social and cultural dimensions of migration (Shrestha, 1988; Pincus, 1996; Seddon, et.al. 2002) <sup>[15, 12, 14]</sup>. However, post-modern critiques related to development, colonialism, and feminism have contributed to the literature by critique of dominant traditions through the social and cultural lens. The migrations are cultural events rich in meaning for individuals, families, social groups, communities, and nations for identity construction and change (Taylor, et.al. 2006; Kaspar, 2005) <sup>[18, 9]</sup>. In her 1998 paper, Levitt coined the term social remittances to call attention to the fact that, in addition to money, migrants export ideas and behaviors back to their sending communities. She observed four types of social remittance norms, practices, identities, and social capital that circulated from receiving- to sending-country communities.

Having talked about the international labor migration's impacts on social and cultural dimensions are manifold, now let us focus on the interrelation between migration and caste relationship. According to the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), "caste discrimination affects an estimated 260 million people worldwide, the vast majority living in South Asia. It involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Caste systems divide people into unequal and hierarchical social groups. Those at the bottom are considered 'lesser human beings', 'impure' and 'polluting' to other caste groups (IDSN, 2023) <sup>[8]</sup>." Many people consider migration as a liberation process that makes them free from all sorts of specific social norms and values. Pariyar rightly depicts the statement when he writes about the Dalit migrants in the UK. He writes that the Dalits have used this opportunity in a new land to release themselves from caste discrimination. Indeed, one of the good things has been that they are, unlike most Dalits in Nepal, economically free: They are no longer bonded to high castes, no longer dependent on them for survival, and no longer forced into stigmatizing roles. Because Dalits are not economically dependent on them, the upper castes have fewer opportunities to dominate them (Pariyar, 2011) <sup>[11]</sup>. Syed Ali (2007) <sup>[3]</sup> argues that the culture of migration<sup>1</sup>

helps to shape the effects of remittances on status relations and marriage patterns among Muslims in Hyderabad, which further promotes migration abroad. The definition of status has been radically altered by the effects and social meaning of migrant remittances, to the point where being a migrant in and of itself has become a high-status identity. This 'migrant-hero' (generally male, but also female) is desirable for a marriage partner, challenging and even displacing other ascribed status identities of caste and nobility, and trumping achieved status of education. Similarly, Kevin E. McHugh (2000) and Silvey and Lawson (1999) <sup>[16]</sup> make an argument about the cultural and social dynamics of migration which play a role in identity construction and facilitate changes in gender, class, ethnicity, age, and styles of living.

Dalits of Nepal, who are at the lowest level of the caste hierarchy traditionally involved in tailoring, and performing *panche baja* or *naumati baja* (traditional music) at weddings and other functions (Tingey 1994) <sup>[19]</sup> and are paid through *jajamani/balighare* system; in Western Nepal, this caste-labor relation is called the *riti-bhagya* system (Cameron 1998) <sup>[5]</sup>. Gaborieau (1977) mentions three types of relationship between householders and service providers: (1) ongoing personal ties (*balighare*, or *jajmani*, relations strictly speaking), (2) more impersonal piecework links, which may sometimes resemble the former, and (3) ties of mendicancy (as with wandering renouncers). We part company with Gaborieau over his insistence that in the whole of central Nepal, the householder-domestic priest (*jajman-purohit*) relation has never been a hereditary or binding link, but is rather a contractual one requiring yearly renewal at every *Dasain* festival (cited in Adhikari & Gellner, 2019: 10) <sup>[2]</sup>. These exploitive caste-based labor relations between Dalits and high castes have started to deconstruct after the Maoist civil war and the migration of Dalits to foreign countries. In recent years, many Dalits have started to migrate to Gulf countries. Adhikari and Hopley (2013) <sup>[1]</sup> have also reported over 70% of the surveyed Dalit households are engaged in international migration from a nearby hill district, Khotang. Ramesh Sunam (2014) observes meaningful shifts in the livelihood of Pariyars of Kuku, Dolakha after international labor migration. He writes,

After migration, Pariyears especially women left to go for works of high castes, left traditional works, buy land, and repair their homes, many become *lakhapati*...the Pariyars have progressed in terms of shifting not only their economic status but also their social identity...On their return, most Pariyars brought TVs, body spray, costly shoes, and leather jackets. A look in jeans, leather jackets, and sports shoes make them the returnee migrant....utilized their transnational experience to directly challenge unjust acts and the hegemony of higher castes. With financial, human, and symbolic capital accumulated through overseas migration, they have reconstructed their cultural and economic contours to their advantage at the place of their origin (pp. 2039-2044).

and migrants. This includes beliefs, desire, symbols, myths, education, celebrations of migration in various media, and material goods (P.39).

<sup>1</sup>The culture of migration is those ideas, practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migration

Off course, a reduced dependency on upper castes and the display of body politics empowered Pariyars to engage in contesting caste institutions openly. The skills they gained in foreign lands are utilized in the community which challenged traditional labor relations among high caste and low caste. This helped to construct a new identity and respect. The new ideas and practices that have the potential to influence gender, caste, and class relations; acquired in migrants receiving country help to gain symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977) <sup>[4]</sup> back in the sending community, commonly known as 'prestige', the accumulation of which may help migrant families to gain other capitals in the form of power, wealth and allies (Poertner, Junginger, and Müller-Böker 2011) <sup>[13]</sup>. The traditional culturally defined and informed agency under "Dharma", Karma, Riti-Bhagya has been challenged and resisted by Dalits using the symbolic power and human capital gained mainly through remittances, transnational experiences, Moist movement and NGOs (Sunam, 2014; Adhikari & Gellner, 2019 <sup>[2]</sup>, Folmer, 2007). Dalits are now becoming confident in asserting their rights. Heightened awareness about injustice and their incessant resistance, protests, struggles, and political participation have resulted in substantial improvement in their position. Different types of social resistance against caste hegemony and the blurred boundary of untouchability are observed in recent years, for example in Nadars of Tamil Nadu and the Ezhavas of Kerala, India (Sooryamoorthy, 2008) <sup>[17]</sup>, in Andhra Pradesh, India (Still, 2009). Having close observation of recent development on blurring caste relations in different societies, Indian sociologist and public intellectual Dipankar Gupta (2005) <sup>[7]</sup> concludes that "indeed this has resulted the collapse of the caste system but also the rise of caste identities."

Numerous scholarly investigations have continuously emphasized the profound influence of labor migration and remittances on caste dynamics. This literature review shows that impact of migration and remittances on the caste system is complicated and multifaceted, and cannot be understood in isolation from the larger socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment. Therefore, an interdisciplinary and nuanced approach is necessary for a thorough understanding of the role of migration and remittances in the shifting caste hierarchy and inter-caste relations in Nepal.

### Study Area and Research Methods

This paper is based on the information collected from fieldwork carried out in 2010 in Narethanti village of Galkot Municipality of Baglung. The village is located at a distance of around 72 kilometers from the district headquarter of Baglung. The village is now connected to Pushpalal mid hill highway. This infrastructure development has played a crucial role in fostering both physical and economic ties, which have now formed an intrinsic part of villagers' identity.

The livelihood of the entire village is sustained by the remittance sent back to the households by the migrant workers working in many regions across the world. The primary migratory destinations for migration from this village are Gulf countries, namely Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Additionally, there has been a noticeable emergence of destinations like as Japan, Korea, Australia, and Portugal, which highlights the diversification of migration destinations. The effects of labor movement and remittance are felt extensively in Narethanti, influencing the

means of subsistence and social dynamics. Because of the long history of migration, the village serves as a tangible manifestation of the complex dynamics involving migration, remittance, and social changes.

In addition to migration, the community pursue its economic sustainability through a wide range of various economic activities. Cultivation continues to be a vital element, as local agricultural endeavors play a significant role in providing nourishment for numerous households. Animal agriculture also serves a crucial function by providing for both nutritional requirements and local economies.

Moreover, some inhabitants of Narethanti sustain their living by engaging in small-scale businesses and shop-keeping. The Non-farm business, encompassing establishments such as quaint tea and grocery stores as well as vibrant restaurants, serve the diverse requirements of local inhabitants. In an effort to enhance economic diversity, local entrepreneurs have ventured into several sectors like tailoring, hardware, electric shops, and book shops. This has resulted in the establishment of a miniature marketplace within the village, which serves as a central location for everyday transactions and commercial activities.

The Gulf countries continue to serve as prominent destinations for migrant workers from Narethanti, however, notable changes are taking place in the migration trends. Japan, Korea, Australia, and Portugal, in addition to several European countries, are increasingly being recognized as attractive destinations for ambitious persons from rural areas. This trend allows them to expand their perspectives and cultivate diverse international networks. The expansion being observed can be characterized as transformative, indicating the village's inhabitants' ability to adapt and persevere. They are now prepared to venture into uncharted territories, moving away from conventional routes. While a significant portion of Narethanti's youths explores the previously stated countries, a small number of them have reached to America. Although the numerical figures may be relatively modest, it symbolizes the overarching global aspirations embodied by Narethanti, as they strive for possibilities and a more promising future in a nation that prides itself on freedom and liberty.

In summary, the village of Narethanti, located strategically along the Pushpalal mid hill highway, serves as more than just a geographical location. It functions as a dynamic intersection where migration, remittance, and many livelihoods converge. The resilient nature of Nepal, together with its ever-changing worldwide networks, exemplifies the intricate linkages it maintains with the broader international community. Each remittance and every journey undertaken abroad contribute to creating the future of this dynamic society. This research examines the intricate connections between the economic operations of Narethanti, the migration endeavors it engages in, and the resulting changes in its social structure, with a specific focus on the caste hierarchy and inter-caste relationships.

### Results and Discussions

In recent years, a significant number of individuals from the village have migrated to abroad in pursuit of employment opportunities, hence rendering remittances a crucial source of sustenance for their respective rural communities. This phenomenon has significantly altered the dynamics of inter-caste interactions among individuals.

### Migration and Changing Dynamics of Caste in the Village

The patron-client occupational relationship is fundamentally rooted in a caste-based division of labor, wherein individuals belonging to distinct caste groups are assigned certain tasks depending on their birth status. The Legal Code of Nepal in 1864 implemented a system of caste-based segregation, establishing a hierarchical structure that assigned distinct roles and responsibilities to different caste groups. The Code assigned Damai Kami and Sharki to the lowest position within a social structure. The aforementioned occupations, including tailoring, metallurgy, and cobbling, were allotted to them. In exchange, they were granted a portion of the agricultural produce by their benefactors. The Damai community engages in the practices of sewing and weaving garments, as well as performing traditional music during significant events such as weddings, naming ceremonies, festivals, and various rites. In a similar vein, the Kami people were designated to do tasks related to craft service and metallurgy, both of which hold significant importance in the context of agriculture. Blacksmiths engaged in the craft of metalworking and were remunerated with a portion of the agricultural produce. Similarly, the cobblers engaged in the task of repairing shoes.

Because of the steady evolution of the occupational system, traditional occupations no longer exist in their original form. Hence, the analysis of jobs based on caste poses challenges when approached through traditional methodologies. Narethanti village, like other regions in Nepal, exhibits similar characteristics in terms of traditional occupation and the dynamics of change. The objective of this chapter is to examine the extent of foreign labor migration and its impact on the occupational dynamics between individuals belonging to the Dalit and non-Dalit castes in the region of Narethanti.

During the course of the interviews, it became evident that the respondents exhibited a lack of knowledge on the origins of the traditional employment relationship. However, they possessed a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and rapidity of the transformation in occupational patterns based on caste that occurred throughout their lifetime. Significantly, elderly artisans shown a notable eagerness to expound upon the characteristics and rapidity of the transformation they had witnessed throughout their lifetime. The participants generally concurred that birth-based vocations have progressively become devoid of caste distinctions, and individuals are no longer seen as pure or impure based on their occupation. According to their perspective, the occupations of tailoring and metallurgy are no longer exclusively associated with individuals from unclean castes, but rather are now considered specialized professions. Based on my observation, it is evident that the three female individuals belonging to non-Dalit households engage in sewing activities at a tailoring center located in Narethanti Bazar. This particular endeavor not only enjoys acceptance but also garners appreciation within the community. Based on my personal observations, such a phenomenon was not evident until approximately a decade ago. Significantly, the women engaged in the craft of sewing garments were not regarded as being as meticulous as the Dalit community, as this particular occupation was traditionally associated with the artisan caste known as Damai. Conversely, individuals

belonging to the Dalit group appeared to be employed as teachers in both public and private educational institutions. Likewise, individuals belonging to the Dalit group are engaged in entrepreneurial endeavors within regional marketplaces. Individuals belonging to the non-Dalit caste were observed engaging in commercial transactions at the establishments owned by members of the Dalit community. During the course of field research, it was observed that the Dalit community has undergone significant changes compared to its previous state approximately 5-10 years ago. The entirety of the village exhibited cleanliness, with residences constructed to include verandas and restrooms. The majority of households appeared to possess at least one cellular device, but a significant portion also owned televisions and VCD players. The children have been enrolled in the nearby English medium school as opposed to the public school. A significant number of households that were engaged in craft work up until a decade or so ago have seemingly discontinued their involvement in such activities. Instead, they have established economic networks with financially prosperous homes from non-Dalit castes within the society.

When inquiring about the factors contributing to change, the respondents indicated that the changing political landscape, their children's school education, and the acquisition of information and knowledge through radio and television programs were significant causes. Significantly, remittance was utilized as an economic mechanism that facilitated the acquisition of these services. Furthermore, the migrant workers who returned placed equal importance on both awareness and the economic benefits acquired through labor migration in order to expedite the process of transformation in the relationship between Dalits and non-Dalits, as well as among the homes of the village.

During the interviews, participants from both Dalit and non-Dalit backgrounds expressed that they had undergone socialization within a societal structure characterized by a caste-based hierarchy and typical occupational labor dynamics. In essence, individuals underwent a process of internalizing the societal norms and values associated with caste-based hierarchies and occupational relationships, thus leading them to engage in the perpetuation of this system. Parshuram Darji endeavored to recollect the historical circumstances surrounding the Dalit group, namely prior to the 1960s, a period during which he began to acquire knowledge on the subject matter. According to his study, the Dalit households possessed few land resources and relied on the households of their patrons for employment as craftsmen or through contractual and wage labor. The majority of Dalit households historically engaged in providing their services and receiving Bali (a portion of the harvest), Vaau (a portion of food offered in rituals), and Jadauri (cloth) from their Bista (patron). According to Darji, it was stated that:

*During my formative years, the ritual of Balighare Partha was observed in our hamlet. In the past, I received instruction in the art of sewing and was subsequently assigned to visit clients' residences with the purpose of presenting the Vaau during noteworthy events. In the meantime, we were strongly advised from entering the residences of the patrons and refraining from physical contact with anybody who are not of the Dalit community. During our formative years, when we acquired the*

*proficiency of sewing, our parents convened us collectively to assist them in their sewing endeavors and partake in the traditional practices of Bali and Vaau. The acceptance of Balighare Partha and the perpetuation of untouchability as a social reality were prevalent, and instead of questioning these practices, they were continued.*

The economic sustenance of Dalit households was historically influenced by the remuneration received for their allegiance, which was contingent upon the benevolence or compassion of their patrons, as there was no established contractual arrangement about the distribution of harvest yields. According to the findings provided by a 65 years old respondent, it was observed that:

*Subsequently, it became apparent that due to our limited land resources, it was imperative for us to persist with the practice of Balighare Partha in order to sustain our entire family. Throughout the course of an entire year, we were required to produce various crafts, contingent upon the availability of crops during each respective harvesting season. In a same vein, we would partake in the festivities by engaging in the communal consumption of food and beverages, commonly referred to as "Vaau." Festivals could only be celebrated in accordance with the sentiments of the benefactors. Despite the presence of commodities in the market, we lacked the financial means to acquire them. Additionally, when non-Dalit individuals would establish separate families, they would divide the number of families of patrons, as they were the primary source of our income. The socioeconomic status and social standing of individuals were once significant determinants of their position within their own caste.*

As per the perspectives of the elder participants, the practice of crafts held significant value as a means of subsistence for Dalit households, although it proved inadequate in fully supporting their livelihoods. The transition from an agrarian economy to a market economy resulted in the displacement of goods and services created by craftsmen with factory-made commodities. Hence, it can be observed that Dalit households have historically engaged in contractual or wage labor inside their villages or have resorted to migration within India prior to their current generation. The reason for their actions was rooted in the insufficiency of both their land and the portion provided by their patron to sustain their livelihood. During the early stages of the current older generation, a significant number of households relied on contractual or wage labor in rural areas to support their livelihoods. However, the task of sustaining oneself through manual labor or as an artisan inside the hamlet proved to be exceedingly challenging. Simultaneously, young individuals hailing from other Dalit households found inspiration in witnessing the progress made by successful Dalit migrants, who were continually enhancing their economic and social circumstances.

Based on the feedback provided by the participants, it was found that the lack of access to resources, experiences of humiliation, and the downgrading of their occupation as menial work compelled young individuals to reconsider

their social standing and served as a driving force behind their decision to migrate. According to Prem BK, the absence of sufficient wealth, modern skills, and the presence of untouchability and a culture of humiliation compelled people to seek alternative opportunities through migration to foreign countries. Due to the substantial financial requirements associated with international travel, a significant proportion of young individuals from the Dalit community often faced limitations in their ability to pursue opportunities abroad. Consequently, India emerged as the primary destination country for the majority of Dalit individuals. In the given scenario, individuals addressed their financial needs through two primary means: engaging in labor-intensive activities or seeking financial assistance from affluent households within the village, irrespective of their Dalit or non-Dalit status. Through the utilization and expansion of their migratory network, a significant portion of Dalit youngsters ultimately relocated to India and afterwards ventured worldwide, where they were able to access vocations that were devoid of caste-based restrictions. Over time, a significant number of young individuals from the Dalit community have gradually severed their vocational and labor ties with non-Dalit individuals, opting instead to seek employment opportunities abroad in order to secure their livelihoods. Labor migration has emerged as a viable alternative for individuals seeking to secure a means of earning, so playing a significant role in sustaining livelihoods. The travel patterns of Dalit youth and the subsequent remittance they provide have had various effects on the dynamics of Dalit and non-Dalit relationships, aligning with their respective means of sustenance.

### **Shifting Dynamics**

During the interviews, the Dalit youth conveyed their inclination to migrate abroad due to the absence of caste-based occupational restrictions in their village, in addition to the prevailing unfavorable economic conditions. Jivan Khatri asserts that foreign countries have exhibited a discernible trend towards heightened occupational specialization and the secularization of daily life. According to his statement, there exists a significant volume of work in foreign countries that is devoid of caste-based restrictions, whereas in rural areas, there is some activity that is influenced by caste considerations. According to his observations, there was no occupation related to a certain caste, but rather jobs were determined based on individuals' skills and abilities. He recounted his personal experience in the following manner:

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a hierarchical structure exists based on religious affiliation. Muslims maintain the highest rank in the religious hierarchy, followed by Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus, respectively. Regardless of an individual's religious or caste affiliation, be it Muslim, Hindu, Brahman, or Biswakarma, the practices and customs that are applicable and effective in one's country of origin may not necessarily be applicable or effective in the country of destination. In the village, job acquisition is mostly determined by an individual's innate skill and competence, rather than being contingent upon factors like as religion, caste, or class-based identity.

In certain foreign nations, it has been seen that the practice of consuming food and beverages in the company of both Dalit and non-Dalit individuals is considered customary.

Conversely, inside the confines of a village, it has been observed that Dalit individuals have historically been regarded as impure, leading to restrictions on direct social interaction with non-Dalit community members. In a same vein, it was customary to observe a tradition wherein individuals deemed dirty were required to undergo a purification ritual including the offering of gold-infused water (known as Sunpani Chharkane) in order to uphold the integrity of their caste purity. According to Ammar Darjee, the notion of purity and impurity in the rural setting has lost its significance beyond national borders. According to his statement, a sense of communal living was prevalent among all individuals during the migratory period. We collectively shared a singular identity and possessed a shared understanding that we were all interconnected as brothers and sisters, united under the common nationality of being Nepali. Bhim Karki also recounted comparable events in that context. The individual revealed that it is customary for individuals from low and non-Dalit backgrounds in a foreign country to share a single bed and kitchen. Additionally, they mentioned that a worker from a non-Dalit family may be open to receiving food and water from a worker who is considered untouchable in the village. According to the individual's perspective, a migrant worker experiences feelings of solitude and disconnection when collaborating with others from various socio-cultural backgrounds in various global regions. When experiencing social isolation from family, kin, relatives, and community, an individual may establish a close bond with fellow countrymen at their workplace, treating them as if they were siblings, regardless of their caste, including those belonging to the Dalit group residing in the village. He additionally asserted that allowing differentiation based on religion, caste, and social status in one's nation of origin is a means of weakening oneself in a foreign territory. The practice of identifying oneself with a shared national identity, such as Bengali, Indian, Nepali, or Pakistani, serves as a means of self-introduction in foreign countries, as opposed to being identified solely by one's caste and class-based identity inside the confines of a village. He raised a query regarding: Upon traversing the Ghodabadhe, to what extent is one's caste discernible? In the absence of personal acquaintance, how can one ascertain the caste affiliation of individuals? Hence, it is seen futile to categorize individuals inside the hamlet based on their caste.

Migrant workers not only experience a caste-free existence in foreign countries but also actively help to its implementation inside their own villages. Migrant workers, particularly those returning from Gulf countries, exhibit a lack of adherence to the principles of purity and pollution during their home visits to rural areas. In his statement, Dal Bahadur Pun asserted that:

The returning migrant workers readily consume food and beverages in hotels, restaurants, and public establishments, alongside Dalit individuals from their own community. In contrast, others are unable to engage in such activities due to their limited mindset, akin to frogs perceiving a small pond as their entire universe.

Irrespective of the existing caste system, migrant workers from non-Dalit backgrounds demonstrate a willingness to engage in social activities such as consuming food and beverages, as well as fostering relationships with individuals from economically privileged households, including those belonging to the Dalit community. Pun further elucidated

that when an individual from a non-Dalit society interacts with a financially and politically affluent individual from the Dalit community, they exhibit a diminished concern for the societal norms pertaining to impurity. It is crucial to note that, in casual discourse, the younger individuals belonging to any social group tend to disregard regulations pertaining to pollution, dietary restrictions, and occupational practices that are prohibited in other rural communities, urban regions, and foreign contexts.

### **The Alteration in Access to Educational Opportunities**

As per the government's policy, educational institutions have been rendered caste-free, ensuring equal accessibility to all individuals in principle. However, the presence of economic resources is crucial in order to access educational possibilities, as they are typically contingent upon the financial capabilities of parents. Migration is facilitating the access of Dalit children to educational possibilities in private institutions, both in rural and urban locations. As per a teacher at Mahendra Higher Secondary School, individuals belonging to the Dalit group receive financial assistance in the form of scholarships and free education. However, Dalit households who have migrated do not enroll their children in public schools due to their belief that English language education is superior. In the interim, it is advisable to engage the services of B.K. The individual expressed that private schools, despite their high cost, had provided them with a valuable understanding of the significance of the English language in international contexts, particularly via their experience working abroad. Consequently, I have enrolled my children in a private school to receive instruction in the English medium.

### **Transformation in the Attitudes and Behaviors of Dalits**

The phenomenon of labor migration, remittance, and awareness has facilitated households in gaining knowledge about various elements of attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that contribute to their subordinate status within a society. Based on the analysis of housing arrangements, possession of sewing machines, and Aran (a traditional garment), one may readily discern the caste affiliation of an individual or household, even in the absence of personal knowledge about that individual or household. Currently, discerning an individual's caste without intimate acquaintance has become a challenging task. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that Dalit houses exhibit cleanliness and modernity comparable to non-Dalit households. Many migrant families have utilized their earnings from working overseas to construct houses using materials such as slate and stone, and furnish them with separate rooms for each family member. Additionally, the placement of toilets is typically situated at a distance from the main residential structures. In this regard, the availability of information and knowledge through television, radio, and movies is progressively influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors. According to B.K, it is observed that when visiting the Masara, a region inhabited by the Sarki people, in the morning, the fragrance of Agarbati (incense) is noticeable. However, traversing through this hamlet was previously hindered because to the unpleasant odor emanating from carcasses.

According to Hire BK, migrant households exhibit a higher level of awareness compared to non-migrant households with regards to their attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics,

all of which are equally crucial in maintaining their untouchable status. The example he provided is noteworthy. The Dalit community has made the decision to cease engaging in the practice of providing services, such as the removal of deceased livestock from the residences of individuals belonging to higher castes, and thereafter consuming the meat. However, it is seen that a majority of migrant and financially affluent households have adhered to the aforementioned decision, whereas economically disadvantaged households have not been able to comply. According to Kumar Sunuwar's observation, the primary determinants for individuals refraining from making judgments are their reliance on external sources for sustenance and a lack of knowledge or consciousness regarding the matter at hand. Sunuwar emphasizes the significance of economic prosperity as a fundamental element in effecting comprehensive transformation in the lives of Dalit individuals within society.

### **Transformation in Agricultural Production and Occupational Relations**

In certain homes, the utilization of foreign labor migration has emerged as a viable strategy to circumvent the conventional patron-client dynamics prevalent within rural communities. In casual social exchanges, particularly among younger individuals, there was a notable lack of enthusiasm in engaging in the conventional occupational roles inherited from their upbringing. During the conducted interviews, it was observed that out of the seven houses belonging to the Dalit stratum, four households have transitioned away from their conventional occupational roles. In the meanwhile, two individuals who have previously engaged in migrant labor from the Damai family are persisting in their pursuit of the tailoring profession. Instead of the traditional patron-client relationship, individuals are engaging in commercial transactions inside local markets. Interactions between various castes has not ceased, as noted by Kumar Sunar. However, the dynamics of these interactions have undergone changes.

The dynamics of interpersonal connections have undergone transformation due to the phenomenon of international migration. According to his statement, individuals from non-migrant Dalit households are engaged in contractual labor, specifically Balighare Partha, wherein they receive predetermined work assignments and a defined remuneration. Similarly, prior to migration, Dalit individuals were inclined to seek employment in tailoring and contractual labor under the patronage of their benefactors, without any restrictions on the nature of work, duration, or remuneration. However, in the present scenario, they predominantly engage in contractual labor with predetermined tasks and fixed monetary compensation. Currently, the practice of reciprocal labor exchange is not restricted by caste boundaries. During the periods of harvesting and planting, households engage in labor exchange with individuals from various castes residing within the hamlet. Currently, it is not uncommon to find individuals from non-Dalit backgrounds, particularly those from impoverished economic circumstances, engaging in wage labor on the farms of Dalit households, rather than Dalit individuals providing services to non-Dalit individuals. This observation indicates that Dalit households in the hamlet are mostly engaged in acts of giving rather than receiving.

Labor migration has played a significant role in enabling Dalit households to achieve independence from their previous patrons in terms of their work and livelihood. Consequently, their reliance on sustenance shifted from local benefactors within the hamlet to becoming proprietors within foreign nations. In the village of Narethanti, the Dalit youth has historically served as both a wage earner and a consumer of commodities, while also receiving a part of resources. In addition to the progressive erosion of caste-based relationships, the movement patterns observed within the Dalit community have also played a role in the decline of traditional caste-based dynamics within the hamlet. In light of the diminishing conventional occupational ties between Dalit and non-Dalit households, a shift towards a class-based relationship has emerged throughout society. Hence, labor migration has evolved into more than just a means of sustenance, but rather a mechanism for dismantling the social dynamics between Dalit and non-Dalit individuals inside the village. The life history of Bhime BK serves as an illustrative example in this context. Prior to the migration of Bhime's sons for labor, his household was engaged in iron work for a total of 55 families. Due to the possession of two Ropanies of agricultural land and the absence of any grassland, the primary means of sustenance for the individual in question relied heavily on the share crops provided by the patron. Due to the unfavorable economic circumstances, the entire family found it necessary to seek employment under customers in order to maintain their livelihoods. However, upon the migration of his eldest son to India at the age of 16, he acquired a means of supplementary financial support that contributed to their sustenance. After a period of two years, he returned to his place of origin and accompanied by his two siblings, journeyed to India. All three siblings diligently labored in a hotel, accumulating funds to settle their outstanding debts. Subsequently, they entered into matrimonial unions and acquired a little parcel of arable land within their rural community. The labor migration presented a transformative opportunity for the family when their eldest son, who had accumulated twelve years of experience as a cook in an Indian hotel, was given the chance to relocate to Japan. According to Bhime, three years prior, his other two sons also migrated to Qatar and urged him to abandon his occupation as a jeweler and engage in wage labor. Despite my own desire to maintain the traditional occupation, I succumbed to the pressure exerted by my family and ultimately relinquished it. Presently, three individuals from this family are engaged in employment outside of Nepal, while the remaining seven members rely on their wages to sustain their livelihoods within the village. Instead of being identified as a household of blacksmiths, this particular household is currently recognized as an upper-class household within the hamlet.

### **Alteration in Ownership of Economic Resource and Access to Political Power**

According to Parshuram Darji, the reliance of Dalit households on non-Dalit households for their livelihoods historically led to a transfer of resources and political influence from Dalit to non-Dalit households. Historically, the conventional occupational association and the lowest position in the caste system have resulted in the marginalization of Dalits, so denying them access to vital resources like as land and employment prospects. In

instances where non-Dalit households exhibited higher levels of economic prosperity and political influence, Dalit households experienced a state of deprivation and marginalization with regards to economic resources and political authority within the community. According to Darji, individuals who relied on a limited quantity of land and lacked off-farm occupations were typically situated in a lower position within the class system. The reliance of Dalit individuals on non-Dalits for "Bali," "Jadauri," and "Vaau" has historically led to the establishment of non-Dalit supremacy over Dalit communities within society. The individuals in question lacked both access to land ownership and involvement in local political affairs. Historically, those who did not belong to the Dalit community have traditionally benefited from inherited privileges, such as access to land resources, governmental positions, and elevated social standing.

However, the pursuit of economic resources, political power, and education possibilities by economically prosperous Dalit households has led to a significant questioning of the entrenched benefits and disadvantages associated with their inherited social status. Consequently, there is a growing trend towards the decoupling of landownership, work, and educational prospects from caste affiliations. Affluent households not only dominate caste-based politics but also actively participate in community-level decision-making processes. Dalit migrant households have assimilated the social, economic, and political characteristics associated with the caste system. Non-Dalit households do not necessarily hold a greater place in the social hierarchy. However, Dalit households, who own assets enabling them to acquire commodities in the market, have also attained a recognized position, despite traditionally occupying the lowest rank in the ritual hierarchy within the community. Nevertheless, the egalitarian attributes of entire caste or ethnic groups have been compromised due to the escalating economic, political, and social imbalances resulting from unequal access to employment possibilities in foreign nations. The life history of Santaram Darji can serve as an illustrative illustration.

Santaram Darji holds the distinction of being the inaugural individual from the Dalit homes in Narethanti to venture abroad as a migrant laborer. Due to the financial constraints faced by seventeen members of his family, an individual received support from a retired member of the Pun family, who had previously served in the British army, to relocate to Saudi Arabia. The earnings in Saudi Arabia not only provided a solution to the immediate financial difficulties but also contributed to the long-term stability of the home.

The individuals experienced changes in their social, economic, and political status throughout this period. During his tenure in Saudi Arabia, he availed himself of home-leave on two occasions, during which he was accompanied by his two boys. The sufficiency of his earnings to sustain his entire family can be attributed to the size of his familial unit. However, upon the successful acquisition of income by his two sons, the family proceeded to purchase a parcel of property measuring five Ropanis from the esteemed Kanchha Mukhiya. In the meanwhile, an additional son relocated to Saudi Arabia and subsequently assumed a permanent role in overseeing the family affairs in the absence of an actively involved male family member.

Upon his permanent return to his residence, he contemplated dedicating himself to social welfare, driven by the aspiration

that his future progeny would hold him in high regard. In the interim, he made a substantial financial contribution to the nearby public school, a sum of enormous magnitude during that era. Subsequently, he was elected to serve as a member of the school administration committee at the aforementioned educational institution. Due to his evident and lucid demeanor, he was entrusted with the role of overseeing the treasury in a local Community Forest User Group, as well as serving on the Dalit Sanjal Committee at the VDC level. Throughout his seven-year period of retirement, he has already assumed significant roles within several social and political organisations.

During this period, Darji has emerged as the primary landowner, holding the highest land ownership not just within the low-caste households but also among the high-caste households in the village. The individual has acquired a land area measuring thirty-two Ropani from Mukhiya, thereafter constructing two residential dwellings and establishing a chicken farm on the premises. The Mukhiya, in order to finance his trip to Chitwan, opted to sell the land that was largely devoid of irrigation potential, while utilizing the irrigated land as collateral within the village. Nevertheless, he has erected a hotel in close proximity to the educational institution for the purpose of accommodating his bereaved daughter. During his retirement, the individual is being supported by his entire family in both time and financial resources, with the aim of contributing to the improvement of society. While the four sons of the individual in question are currently residing overseas and earning income, the youngest son, daughters, and daughters-in-law are actively assisting in the management of both household affairs and agricultural operations. All six of his sons have already entered into matrimony, while three of his daughters remain unmarried. Additionally, there are seven grandchildren. Interestingly, the household has not been divided. He elicited laughter by his statement, "When individuals inquired about the means by which I have managed to maintain familial cohesion." In response, the individual states that if they possessed property, their sons may attempt to establish separate households. However, due to their low-caste status, they lack any property to divide, resulting in all family members residing together under one roof. It is worth noting that the Darji family expended a significant sum of money in an attempt to treat the individual's wife, who unfortunately passed away the previous year.

### **Weakening Caste Relations and the Emergence of Class Relations**

Labor migration facilitates individual mobility by offering opportunities for occupational selection and access to economic resources, thereby enabling individuals to become self-reliant and break free from previous patron-client relationships. The cessation of the link between Dalit migrant households and non-Dalit individuals has not occurred; rather, there has been a discernible shift in the dynamics of the relationship between members of various caste groups within the society. In response to the gradual erosion of caste dynamics, migrating Dalits have forged connections predicated upon economic prosperity and political influence. The self-sufficiency of the Dalit family not only facilitated the dismantling of the patron-client dynamic, but also empowered them to establish connections with economically prosperous houses, including those



beyond the Dalit community. In numerous interviews, it has been seen that individuals who do not belong to the Dalit community express a willingness to broaden their social connections on the basis of economic factors.

The concept of position is utilized in lieu of a hierarchical relationship based on caste. Hence, the relative significance of the class link among households and the caste relationship has emerged as a prominent topic of societal concern. The Nepalese government has implemented many legislative measures, programs, and initiatives; yet, these measures have proven insufficient in effecting substantial changes to the foundational structure of caste dynamics inside rural communities. The phenomenon of labor migration and remittance has played a significant role in the emergence of a class hierarchy, effectively replacing the traditional caste structure that was determined by birth in society. Endogamous marriage continues to be subject to some limitations in contemporary society. To put it differently, inter-caste marriage encounters significant societal resistance. However, the level of restrictions has decreased compared to previous periods. It has come to my attention that a young woman, hailing from a family that does not belong to the Dalit community, tragically took her own life due to her parents' refusal to consent to her marriage with a young man from a Dalit background. Furthermore, it is important to consider the additional consequences of migration on the connection between Dalit and non-Dalit communities. These effects are closely intertwined with the impacts on class dynamics, as elaborated upon in the subsequent sub-chapter.

### Conclusion

This study shows that labor migration and remittance have emerged as potential drivers of change in the caste system, providing opportunities for lower-caste individuals to improve their economic and social status, and challenging traditional notions of caste hierarchy and inter-caste relations in western Nepal. The migration has emerged as a catalyst for significant changes, leading to a fundamental reshaping of the established norms around caste-based discrimination and social hierarchy.

It is worth noting that Dalits have actively engaged in migration, since they take comfort in the fact that their caste becomes predominantly inconspicuous to prospective employers outside. The findings of this research indicate that when individuals from diverse backgrounds work and live together in abroad, the significance of caste disparities diminishes, suggesting the presence of a more egalitarian atmosphere.

It is crucial to acknowledge the significant impact that labor migration and remittances have on the caste system. The economic and social position of lower-caste individuals has witnessed notable advancements, hence presenting a challenge to conventional perceptions of caste hierarchy and inter-caste dynamics. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the influence of these components is multifaceted and dependent on certain conditions, necessitating additional research to gain a comprehensive understanding of their intricate function.

In conclusion, the caste is currently experiencing a process of transformation. This shift is being facilitated by the phenomenon of labor migration and the subsequent remittances that are being sent back to Nepal. Despite the existence of ongoing challenges, it is crucial to acknowledge

the significance of policies and programs that facilitate and empower labor migration. Such initiatives have the potential to greatly augment social and economic mobility, particularly for persons belonging to lower castes. This study also holds wider significance for societies encountering comparable obstacles pertaining to caste-based discrimination, underscoring the imperative of sustained endeavors to thoroughly tackle these concerns. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that additional investigation is necessary in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the complex processes involved in the evolving caste system of South Asia.

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