

Socio-Economic Aspects of Labour Migration: A Case Study of Nepali Migrants in Kalpa, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract : *Migration is an important social process of population movement, temporarily or permanently from one geographical area to another. Push factors repulse people from their native places. On the other hand, labour migration could enhance economic sustainability in their native places with a constant flow of remittances. Nepal is one of the backward countries in South Asia, suffering from the adverse effect of population explosion and slow economic growth. Volatile political conditions mainly the prolonged civil war of Maoist has created the situation more vulnerable. Nepali labours are forced to migrate in India and other countries. Remittance is one of the main contributors to Nepal's economy. The Mid-Western, Western and Far Western regions of Nepal are facing this scenario badly. A large amount of rural population from these regions is visiting different areas of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand during the harvesting period of apple as the seasonal labourers. Kalpa, famous for Kinnauri Apple, is the perfect example of this scenario. There is a long tradition of migration from Nepal. These labourers are locally known as 'Bahadur' as they hard workers and courageous. They are extremely helpful for plucking, packaging and transporting of apples from high terrain areas. The remittances help them to maintain families during the lean periods. This is an inclusive case study which explores the different socio-economic aspects of the migration of Nepali labourers in Kalpa and surroundings emphasising on nature, cause and consequences.*

Key words: *Apple Harvesting Period, Migration, Nepali labourers, Remittances.*

Introduction

Labour migration is an important aspect of population studies. In the contemporary world, labour migration is a common scenario. It has a great impact on the socio-economic, cultural and psychological life of people, at the place of immigration and emigration (Kaur, 2003). It is mostly influenced by social structures and pattern of development. Labour migration has been a feature of Nepalese livelihood strategies for at least 200 years; the first large-scale migration being that of men from the hills to join *Gurkha* Regiments (Carroll, 2012). It plays a key role in Nepal's economic development. Nepal is one of the poor countries of the world suffering from social inequalities and poor infrastructural growth. It ranks 143 among

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the 187 countries in terms of HDI index (0.558) and GDP per capita is only \$729 (Human Development Report, 2016). Due to proximity and easy access, a large number of Nepalese prefer to migrate in India as unskilled labourers. Majority of them are seasonal migrants. Seasonal migration (also known as labour circulation) has also long been a major feature of livelihoods in rural Nepal (Rose and Scholz, 1980). The mid-western and far western parts of Nepal are one of the backward regions in terms of resource generation. Hostile and remote mountain areas of these regions are one of the poorest in the world (Gurung, 2005). So, marginal people are forced to migrate towards neighbouring areas of India spatially to Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Punjab during harvesting periods.

Himachal Pradesh is an important part of apple production in India. The state has ideal agro-climatic and geographical conditions for apple cultivation (Wani and Songara, 2018). The apple of Kinnaur district, *Kinnauri* Apple is best in Himachal Pradesh for its quality (Swarup and Sing, 1987). In 2017-18 financial years, Himachal Pradesh produced 446.57 thousand metric ton apples and Kinnaur district produced 21.57% of it i.e. 96.36 thousand metric ton (Horticultural Statistics, 2018). This district stands 3rd in Himachal Pradesh in terms of apple production. There is spatial and temporal variation in apple production throughout the Himachal Pradesh subject to variations in temperature, humidity and snowfall events (Sen, 2015). Climate change has a serious impact on apple production which also hampers the state economy (Rana et.al, 2011). The production is also dependent on migrant labourers from Nepal. Every year a good number of Nepali labourers seasonally migrate to the apple orchards of Himachal Pradesh (Chauhan, 2014). The orchardists largely depend on this migrant labour force because they are hard workers and cheap. They can carry the huge load in steep slope with high altitudes (Thakur et.al, 2018). After 2015, 'Nepal Earthquake', the flow of Nepali migrant had reduced a lot and apple production in entire Himachal Pradesh suffered (Bishit, 2015).

There are various research papers, articles available on apple production techniques, climate change and variation of apple production in Himachal Pradesh. However, no such research was found on migrant labourers that are an integral part of this production system. The newspaper reports and articles show the importance of these labourers but their activities, migration pattern, duration are still unknown. In this context, this paper is an attempt to explore the various socio-economic aspect of labour migration from Nepal to Himachal Pradesh. This is an inclusive case study of Kalpa and surroundings which is an important apple production zone of Kinnaur district.

Objectives

The present study deals with the following objectives;

- i. To study the role of Nepali migrant labourers in apple production system,
- ii. To study their work culture and environment,

- iii. To study their origins, nature and duration of their migration.

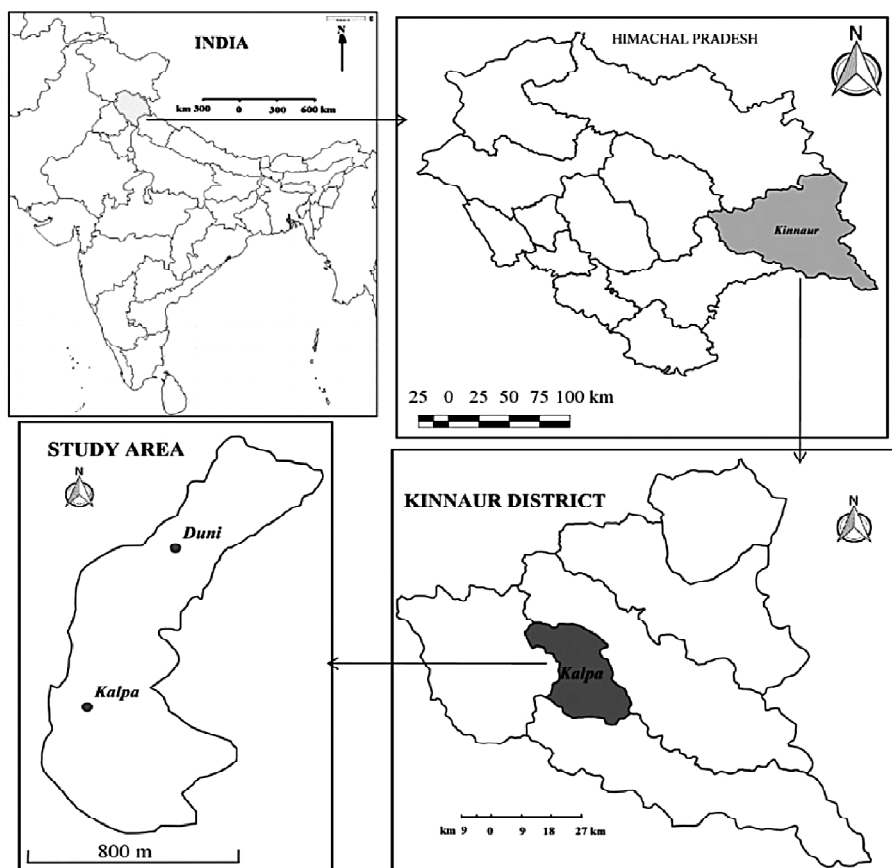
The Study Area

Kalpa (31°32'19.62"N, 78°15'6.19"E) and Duni (31°32'42.26"N, 78°15'27.61"E) both villages are located in Kalpa Tehsil of Kinnaur district, Himachal Pradesh. Kalpa village is an important village of Kalpa panchayat. The area of the village is 97.98 hectares with an average elevation of 2960 m. As per 2011 census, Kalpa has a total population of 1,236 peoples of which 633 males and 603 females of 310 households (District Census Handbook, Kinnaur 2011). Duni is a medium size village under Duni panchayat. It is located at 2.2 km north-east from Kalpa village. The total area of Duni village is 47.65 hectares with an average elevation of 2701 m. As per 2011 census, the total population of Duni is 520 of which 280 males and 240 females, live in 132 households. Literacy rate of Kalpa and Duni are respectively 86.04% and 84.22% (District Census Handbook, Kinnaur 2011). The nearest town is Reckong Peo, the district headquarter of Kinnaur. Kalpa village is located 6.5 km west of Reckong Peo and Duni is at 5.6 km north-west of it.

These pictorial villages are located on the western bank of Satluj in front of the Kinnaur Kailash range. Due to high elevation, there is a cold temperate climate with long winter from October to May. June is the hottest month with averagely 22.8°C temperature and January is the coldest month with an average temperature of -4.2°C. Average annual precipitation is only 65.0 cm and the considerable amount is experienced during winter as snowfall (IMD, 2015). This cold temperate climate is ideal for several fruits apple, plum, apricot, wall nut etc. Kalpa and surrounding area are famous for 'Kinnauri' Apple which is considered as the best in India. The economy of the local people highly depends on the apple orchards. As per D.A.O office, Reckong Peo; there are respectively 46.62 and 23.67 hectares apple orchards in Kalpa and Duni villages. Total 3692.91 hectares area of Kalpa block is under apple orchards which is 35.33% of Kinnaur district (Sharma, 2011). Three types of apples are grown in this area; Royal Delicious, Macintosh and Green Delicious (Indian Horticulture Database, 2013).

Methodology

The most important research question of the present studies is: What is the function of Nepali migrant labourers in apple production at Kalpa and how their migration occurs? Previous researchers have emphasised only in apple production techniques, marketing, climate change and variation of apple production in Himachal Pradesh. Labours and their functions are very important in any production system. Apple production is labour-intensive farming which requires specific labours at various stages. No research has discussed the function of labourers and their status of the migration. The orchardists of Himachal Pradesh are highly depended on Nepali labourers. So, there is a unique research scope to highlight the issue of migrant labourers from Nepal.



Map 1: Location Map and Study Area

The present research is based on fieldwork and both primary and secondary data were collected and used. The field observation and investigations were conducted from 9th October to 11th October 2017, during the peak season of apple harvesting. During the field visits, the physical observation was made on different activities of the migrant labourers. Total 52 Nepali migrants were surveyed, 30 (57.69%) from Kalpa and 22 (42.30%) from Duni village through stratified random sampling with pre-structured questionnaire schedule. Interviews were also conducted with the orchardists for different issues of Nepali labourers and apple production system. Emphasis was given for preparing a collective and co-relative account by assembling the result and information of the collective data which are relevant to the present studies. Secondary data were collected from Kalpa and Duni Panchayat offices; and D.A.O office, Reckong Peo about the Nepali labourers and orchards. Several books, newspaper reports, articles, research papers, government and census

reports (discussed in introduction/literature review) were also collected and consulted. Collected quantitative and qualitative data are presented in specific statistical and graphical format in data analysis. For the preparation of maps, Quantum GIS version 2.4 was used.

Data Analysis and Results

This segment is divided into two parts. In first part, demography and activities of the migrant labourers are discussed. The second part discusses the migration emphasising on their origins, transit routes and durations.

Nepali Migrant Labourers and Their Activities

Nepali labourers are very important in different stages of apple production. Among the total (N=52) surveyed migrant Nepalese 88.46% (n=46) are male and 11.54% (n=6) are female. Female labourers have migrated with their families. Their average age is 32.09 years ($\sigma = 11.762$) and the majority of them (42.30%) belongs to 15-30 years age group. Most of them are Hindus (84.62%) and rest 15.38% Buddhist. Total seven castes were found among the migrants and the majority of them are *Magar* (23.07%), followed by *Chhetri* (21.15%), *Tharu* (15.38%), *Bhujel* (13.46%), *Gurung* (11.53%), *Kumal* (9.62%) and *Newar* (5.77%). Different castes have their colloquial languages and dialects but they speak Nepali to communicate with each other. They are also familiar with Hindi and Pahari languages which are widely spoken in Kalpa and surroundings. The level of education of the migrant labourers is not satisfactory. 44.23% (n=23) are literate which is well below than the national average (65.9%) of Nepal (National Population and Housing Census, Nepal 2011).

There are three broad steps of apple production, pre harvesting, harvesting and post-harvesting. (Kanwar, 1987). Each step is very crucial, requires intensive labour. It was noticed that most (65.38 %, n=34) of the surveyed Nepali labourers are engaged with harvesting steps, eventually, they are seasonal migrants. Rest (34.61%, n=18) are engaged with pre-harvesting steps, mostly temporary migrants. Post harvesting steps are controlled and managed by the orchard owners or leaseholders with the workers from Punjab, Haryana and other parts of Himachal Pradesh. The majority (36.52%, n=19) of the migrants are engaged in manual transporting of apples to the nearest motorable roads from the upstairs orchards. Another section (21.15%, n=11) of the migrants, pluck apples which do not drop down, even after dropping seasons. They manually collect apple from the branches of the trees located in steeper slopes. The Nepalese are the expert to carry huge loads in steeper hills. So there is no alternative to the Nepalese and even they are very useful to carry household loads. Some of the labourers (11.54%, n=4) drive the pickup vans to transport apples from orchards to stores and none of them has

Indian driving license. They have the same kind of driving experience as they drive in native places. 17.30% (n=9) of labourers are engaged in plant nursing, 11.53% (n=6) are storekeeper and 5.77% (n=3) are specialised in pollination. Plant nursing including pollination and storekeeping are regular activities and temporary migrants are associated with these activities. Interestingly the *Gurungs*, from Kaski district of Nepal, are all temporary migrants. They are mostly engaged with plant nursing and pollination with honey bees and some are storekeeper. The traditional work of the *Gurungs* is honey hunting and that's why they are hired for pollination of apples. Some of the *Gurungs* have migrated with their families and female members of the *Gurung* community engaged in fruit collecting in dropping season and plant nursing, mulching.

The Nepalese are hard-working people and they averagely work for 9.1 hours/day ($\sigma = 1.846$). Duration of work depends on the type of work, size of the orchards, distance, weather and physical strength of the individuals. It was noticed that the work duration of the harvester, porter and transport workers are longer as they are seasonal migrants and they try to earn more within a short span. Activities in orchard usually start at 8 am and finish at 5 pm. But during peak harvesting time this schedule increases. The average daily income of the surveyed labourers is Rs. 425.57 ($\sigma = 99.196$) and wages of the male are high than the female. Though wages are fixed daily they paid weekly. The monthly average income of the labourers is Rs.12,767 which is near about 20,449.71 Nepali Rupee (1 Indian Rupee = 1.6 Nepali Rupee). Negative correlation ($r = -0.685$) is found between age and daily wages. This indicates that works in the orchards of high terrain need extraordinary physical effort and youths are earning well. There is no authentic way to transfer the remittances, in emergencies they usually send money through the neighbours or friends who suppose to visit the native places. Otherwise, they bear the sum while returning home.

Migration Status of Nepali Labourers

(A) Origin

Nepal is divided into five development regions from east to west; Eastern, Central, Western, Mid Western and Far Western. Most of the migrants (59.62%, n=31) are coming from the Mid-Western development regions of Nepal followed by Western (25%, n=13) and Far Western development region (15.38%, n=8). The development regions of Nepal are further divided into some geographical zones and mostly known according to the river basins. It was noticed that majority (40.38%, n=21) of the surveyed labourers are from Rapti zone and rest are from Bheri (19.23%, n=10), Seti (15.38%, n=8), Lumbini (13.46%, n=7) and Gandaki (11.54 %, n=6) zones. Surkhet district stands first and both Salyan and Rukum districts stand the second in term of labour migration to Kalpa and surrounding areas. (Table: 1)

Table 1: Shows the Origin of the Migrant Nepali Labourers

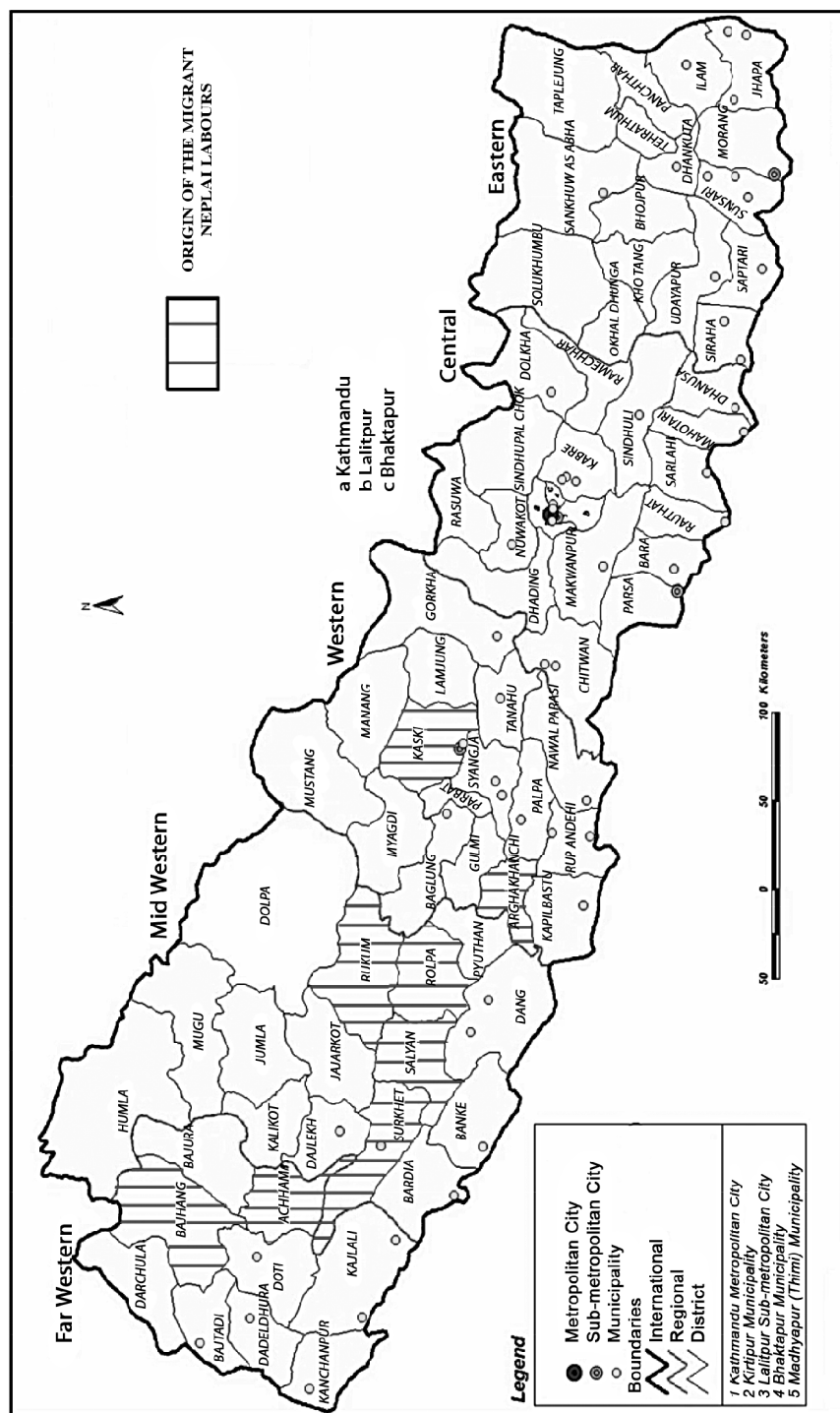
Development Regions	Geographical Zones	Districts	Physical Region and Ecological Belt	No. of Migrants	% age of Migrants
West Nepal	Gondoki	Kaski	Pokhara Valley and Annapurna Range (Middle Hill)	6	11.54 %
	Lumbini	Arghakhanchi	Mahabharat Range and Inner Terai Valley (Middle Hill)	7	13.46 %
Mid West Nepal	Bheri	Surkhet	Inner Terai Valley and Mahabharat Range (Middle Hill)	10	19.23 %
		Salyan	Siwalik Hill and Dang Valley (Middle Hill)	8	15.38 %
	Rapti	Rukum	Mahabharat and Dhaulagiri Himalaya (Middle Hill)	8	15.38 %
		Rolpa	Mahabharat and Dhaulagiri Himalaya (Middle Hill)	5	9.62 %
Far West Nepal	Seti	Achham	Dhaulagiri Himalaya (Middle Hill)	3	5.77 %
		Bajhang	Northern Himalayas (Mountain)	5	9.62 %
	Total			52	100 %

Source: Primary Survey

Nepal has three ecological zones from north to south, Mountains (>2,500 m), Hills (1,300-2,500 m), and the *Terai* plains (50-1300 m) (Hack, 1960). The hilly areas of the Far-Western and Mid-Western region are considered to be the poorest areas in the country in terms of food security, accessibility, education, and employment opportunities (Acharya, 2009). 59.62 % (n=31) of migrants have come from these areas to Kalpa and Duni village.

(B) *Transit Routes*

The Nepalese migrants come to Himachal Pradesh from two popular transit points, Tanakpur and Rupaiddhia. Tanakpur is a municipal town in Champawat district of Uttarakhand state which is just opposite of Bhimdatta city of Nepal. Bhimdatta is the nearest transit point towards North India. It is the headquarter of Kanchanpur district in Mahakali zone. Bhimdatta is connected to the other parts of Nepal by



the 'Mahendra Highway'. On the other hand, Tanakpur is connected with Indian broad gauge railway network to Delhi and Lucknow. Moreover, there is a direct bus service between Tanakpur and Shimla. The migrants of Achham, Bajhang, Salyan, Surkhet districts prefer this route to come to Kalpa and other parts of Kinnaur district.

Another popular transit point is Rupaidiha of Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh. It is just opposite of Nepalgunj, the headquarter of Baitadi district in Bheri zone of Nepal. Nepalgunj is just 10 km away from 'Mahendra Highway' and connected with Mid West and Western part of Nepal by bus services. Where, Rupaidiha is connected with Gonda by broad gauge railway. The migrant labourers of Rukum, Rolpa, Arghakhanchi, Kaski districts prefer Rupaidiha transit point. There is seasonal direct bus service from Rupaidiha to Shimla for them. However, the transit route can be altered on the basis of availability of bus services. Some of the labour also use train service from Rupaidiha to Gonda by passenger train. Then Gonda to Chandigarh by express or mail train and then they take the bus from Chandigarh to Reckong Peo.

Table 2: Transit Routes of Surveyed Migrants Labourers

Preferred Transit Routes	Mode of Transport	No. of Respondents	%age
Tanakpur-Shimla-Reckong Peo	Bus Service	18	34.62
Rupaidiha -Shimla-Reckong Peo	Bus Service	26	50
Rupaidiha -Gonda- Chandigarh-Reckong Peo	Train-Train-Bus	8	15.38
Total		52	100

Source: Primary Survey

(C) Type and Duration of Migration

65.38 % (n=34) of the surveyed Nepalese labourers are seasonal migrants and rest 34.62% (n=18), temporary migrants. The status of migration depends on types of work. There are various activities in the orchards and apple production system. It was noticed that seasonal labourers are engaged in harvesting steps. Majority of the surveyed seasonal migrants 41.17% (n=14) stay for 2-4 months during harvesting time (September to November) of apples. These labourers usually visit Kalpa and surrounding areas in between planting and harvesting time of paddy in their native places. They prefer to return home just before or during the harvesting time.

The workers, engaged with pre-harvesting steps such as storekeeping, plant nursing and pollination are temporary migrants. They usually visit home twice a year (mostly in winter and monsoon) and during their home visit, they don't

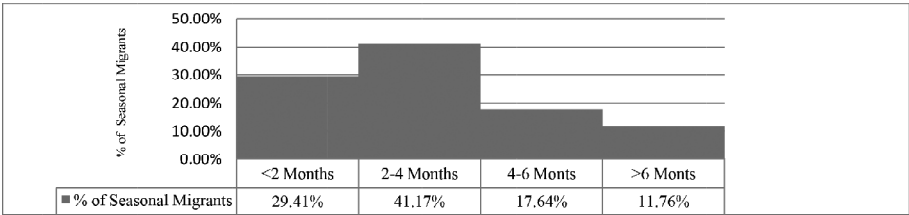


Fig 1: Duration of Seasonal Migration

participate in farm activities as they don't have agricultural land in their native places.

Discussion

Labour migration plays a key role in Nepal's economy. The remittance accounts for approximately 28 % of Nepal's total GDP. There is a huge increase in the inflow of remittances, from 58.6 billion NPR in 2003-04 to 589.5 billion NPR in 2014-15 (Bohara, 2015). Presently, Nepal has emerged as a remittance economy. In 2012 it was the third-largest recipient of remittances as a share of GDP in the world and the top recipient among least developed countries (World Bank, 2014). Almost half of the populations of the Mid-Western development regions migrate seasonally for work. The main reasons are poverty and food insecurity. Moreover, this part of Nepal is the residence of hill *Janjaties* such as *Magar*, *Kham*, *Tharu*, *Bhujel* etc. that are neglected by upper castes. The *Janjaties* have a limited amount of agricultural, practising marginal farming. Agricultural production is not sufficient, hampered by the conjugative floods. Infrastructural development is also not satisfactory so the tourism sector is not developing. Extreme poverty, social inequalities, and economic disparity created a mass extremist movement (1996-2006) in Rapti, Bheri, Seti and Lumbini zones and surrounding areas. *Magar-Kham* communities were in the lead role of the Maoist movement (Basnett, 2009). The extremist activity has also increased regional disparity. The Mid-Western and Far-Western regions are backward in terms of human development. Where the overall poverty rate of Nepal was 32%, this figure increases to 45% for the Mid-Western region and 41% for the Far Western region (Sherpa, 2010). These two Development Regions were the worst hit by the political conflict in the last two decades. The conflict impeded all kind of development in the area, forcing young men to migrate for safety and work. After the opening of east-west stretched, 'Mahendra Highway' across the country, followed by spur roads south to north, the Nepali youth can move easily to the transit points towards India such as Nepalgunj, Tanakpur, Birgunj etc. The 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship' between India and Nepal (1950), allows free transit of Nepalese to India (Hodder et.al.1998).

So, out-migration from these areas is very common. A large number of such Nepalese migrate to different apple producing areas of Himachal Pradesh. The migrants of Kalpa and surroundings are coming from specific areas of Far-Western and Mid-Western regions of Nepal. These migrant labourers have been traditionally

engaged with the farm activities. They are normally from the same villages or neighbouring places, either relatives or neighbours to each others. So, they have developed a unique supply network of labourers to the same area; generation after generation. These labourers are mostly unskilled young males, engaged in agriculture either as marginal farmers or landless labourers. This outer migration provides an alternative opportunity and remittances improve their financial conditions.

Conclusions

Apple production is one of the large contributors to the state economy of Himachal Pradesh. This is a labour-intensive system and local people do not participate in harvesting work. So, the orchardists are very much depended on migrant Nepalese. The Nepalese are courageous and hard-working people. Majority of them are from mountainous areas of Nepal which is similar to Himachal Pradesh. So, their home experiences help them to cope with the situations. Without their contributions, the apple harvesting process cannot be performed in Himachal Pradesh. In 2015 after the Nepal earthquake, the flow of Nepali migrants was reduced and production of apple hampered so severely that it was a political issue in the state. It is estimated that five lakh Nepalese are hired by the orchards every year, a few of them are registered with Govt. of Himachal Pradesh. There is no authentic data about these migrant labourers to the Government. However, every year thousands of such labourers visit the state and contribute to the state economy. During the harvesting time, the majority of them stay in inhumane conditions without having basic amenities in the orchards. Most of them have no knowledge of labour rights. Even they cannot send their remittances through banking systems and often cheated by the money launders. The Government of Himachal Pradesh must take proper policies and initiatives in collaboration with Government of India and Nepal for hassle-free transit and safe transfer of remittances of the Nepali labourers. There must be an authentic database of the migrant labourers for proper monitoring of their activities and needs. So, an extensive survey is very much required. The state Govt. must ensure the rights and well-being of the migrant workers so that they shall continue their contributions to the state economy.

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