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Population movement within Nepal and across the border is not a very recent phenomenon. Historically, population migration from Nepal started during the unification of the small principalities into a large nation-state, Nepal, by Prithvi Narayan Shah, King of Gorkha (Regmi 1971). Major out-migration began after 1816 with recruitment in the Indian and the British armies during the British raj in India due to the post-war period (Regmi 1971; Elahi & Sultan 1985). The later out-migrants were attracted by tea plantations and the construction works in Assam, Darjeeling, Garhwal and Kumaon (English 1985) and the reclamation of land for rice-fields in Assam (Shrestha 1985). The massive migration within the country took place with the introduction of the government resettlement programme (Bishop 1993: 59) after the eradication of malaria from the Terai in the 1950s. The government resettlement programme in the Terai belt more or less slowed down permanent emigration to India. In *Landlessness and Migration in Nepal* (1990), Shrestha discusses the phenomenon of Nepalese migration within the country in its historical, political and social contexts. He emphasises internal migration as a solution to the economic and ecological problems of the Nepalese hills.

However, the temporary or seasonal migration beyond national boundaries continues to supplement family incomes in the Nepalese hills, as English writes, "Hill-men continue to supplement family incomes by taking work for years at a time as road builders and timber cutters in Sikkim, Bhutan, and in India's Western Himalayan districts" (English 1985: 76). In Jumla District, seasonal migration plays a very important role in the economic life of villagers. It is one of the means of acquiring the daily necessities to sustain village life. This paper will explain seasonal migration from a single Hindu village, Botā, one of the three villages of Mālikā Botā V.D.C. (Village Development Committees), situated north of Jumla District. It does not provide any migration statistics, rather it explains social relations and the complex organisational structure of migration. The

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research was conducted between September 1996 and March 1997 in Botā. The author herself accompanied the trading groups from the village to Nepalgunj, the exit point to India. It took seven days.

Geographic and Economic Context

Jumla District is the headquarters of the remote Karnali Zone in mid-western Nepal. It is a six/seven-day-walk from Surkhet (the nearest town) in southern Bheri Zone and three-quarters of an hour by plane from Nepalgunj in southern Rapati Zone.

Botā is situated at the head of the Sinjā River Valley, north of Jumla District, at an altitude of 2800m to 3000m. It is a two-day-walk from the district headquarters over a river trail and one day over the high mountain pass. The village is entirely inhabited by Hindus known as Matwāli Chetri (the Chetri who drink alcohol) and four *Kāmi* households. It is composed of 145 households and divided into several neighbourhoods or hamlets, locally called *bādo*. Each *bādo* comprises one or several long houses called *pāgri*; a *pāgri* is a group of houses called *dwāng*, constructed one after another sharing a common roof and terrace resembling a simple long house. The ground floor of a *pāgri* is called *goth* (cowshed). Each *pāgri* is usually inhabited by the same lineage and extended lineage.

The economy of the village is primarily based on agriculture on irrigated land, locally called *bhuwā*, and they own little irrigated land (*khet*). The villagers of Botā (Botāl) also raise livestock, especially sheep and goats. Since the creation of the Rārā National Park along the village border, the livestock have drastically decreased. To supplement income caused by this loss, the villagers increasingly depend on seasonal migration to sustain their lives in the village.

Despite the importance of seasonal migration in the village economy, this practice is mostly popular among the Sinjāl (the inhabitants from the Sinjā Valley where Botā is located are referred to by the term 'Sinjāl) and the Bhotya of Mugu District in Karnali Zone. The latter group lives in an area unsuitable for agriculture and concentrate more on trading. Although the Sinjāl live in a relatively good agricultural area, their trading is more diversified. The Sinjāl are known for their trading skills among the people of Jumla, their

southern neighbours and even in India. According to Bishop (1970: 21), the Sinjāl have inherited this trading tradition from the Malla period when Hāt Sinjā (one of the villages of Sinjā Valley) was the summer capital of the Malla kingdom, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The word *hāt* refers to a "market".

The Botāl differentiate two types of migration; the first is labour migrants to Nainital. They stay away from the village for a long period: from seven/eight months to three/four years. The other migration is to *deśa*, which means, according to Turner's Nepali dictionary, "country, territory or region", but for the Botāl, migration refers to the plains of the Terai and India, where they go for trading rather than labour. Those migrants are called *haṭhauro*² and are away from the village for only three or four months from October/November to February/March. The trading trip is carried out every year at the same time and only men participate; a few low-caste women, especially the *Damāi* (tailors), accompany their men on this trip. This paper will deal only with trading migrants.

Preparation

In Botā as well as in the Sinjā Valley as a whole, seasonal migration coincides with agricultural work. By the end of October and November, the agricultural work for the year is over and the new cycle does not begin until February or March. Between this period the men are free while the women are occupied throughout the year. Winters are very cold in this region and men state that they do not like winters. Instead of staying home in the cold, doing nothing, they would rather earn some money during their leisure time to supplement their daily necessities and to also save some grain at home. Moreover, shovelling snow off the roofs is considered women's work, thus the men explain, "we would rather go to India than to throw women's snow" (*āimāiko hiū phālnu bhandā deśa jānu jāti*).

² The word *haṭhauro* must have been derived from *haṭh* which means "fair" or "bazaar" in Kāśmiri. In Nepali the word is written *hāt* (Turner 1990, first ed. 1931: 635) and the market takes place periodically in a given territory. The only migrants who go to the Terai or India for three or four months are called *haṭhauro* and they go almost every year. Thus, the migrants returning from *hāt* are called *haṭhauro*.

The villagers meticulously plan their migration weeks in advance. Everyone prepares enough rations—flour, rice and beans—for the journey to Surkhet (the nearest large town from the village). The migrants form a group of seven or eight members³ of diverse ages and not necessarily from the same lineage or extended lineage. Age plays a very important role in the organisation of the group due to the division of work. Hence, each group chooses a *nāike* (group leader) who will be in charge of all members during the trip. His decisions will be final and respected by all members. Most of the time, the eldest of the group is chosen as leader, because he is considered to be more experienced on trading trips to India in comparison to younger members. The group's success depends on his experience.

When everything is ready, the *dhāmi* (oracle) of the village god, Māhādeu, is consulted for the auspicious day and time of departure. If a group wants to leave immediately, they go without consulting the god; usually this only happens with groups of younger members. On the return trip, each individual brings at least one bell for the village god to thank him for his protection during their sojourn in India. If trading was good, he also brings *ghumco* (red and white cloth, usually measuring one square meter).

Departure

In the morning, everyone in the migrant families is busy preparing *arni* (different delicacies for daybreak), which should last as far as Surkhet. If someone is leaving for the first time on migration, he is called *pante*⁴ and his family has to prepare some other titbits which will be distributed among the members of the group after crossing the Hāudi *lek*h (the highest pass on the way to Surkhet). While crossing this pass as a new participant, he will be carried on the back of a member of the group to circumambulate the divinity of the pass. Afterwards, he must offer the titbit or yoghurt to other

³ Sometimes the group may have ten or eleven members but it is very rare. The villagers do not like to form a big group because Indian villagers are very reluctant to give shelter to a large group and it is very difficult to organise them.

⁴ There is no mention of "pante" in the Turner dictionary but the word "panthan" in Sanskrit means "way."

members to celebrate the event. Usually young boys start participating in trading trips at the age of twelve or thirteen.

At the time of leaving home, the person who is leaving receives a *tikā* (mark of husked rice put on the forehead) from his mother outside the house on the *otālo* (terrace). Then she pours one *mānā* of husked rice in his *āncā/patukā* (a cloth tied around the hips). This rice is called *āncā māno*. The migrant keeps it with him throughout the day and in the evening he cooks it to avoid dropping it on the floor. If this happens, it is a bad omen. *Āncō māno* may be given by anyone but it is usually given by the members of one's own lineage to bring good luck. He may also receive walnuts, said to bring good luck. On his return trip, he should bring gifts to all those from whom he received *āncō māno* and walnuts.

After this ritual, the migrant directly goes to the edge of the village to wait for other members of the group. When everyone has arrived, each one hangs *dhajā* (strips of white and red cloth) and bows before the *dhutelo* (prickly shrub) which marks the boundary of the village, before leaving it behind. Just outside the village, some members of the trading trip sacrifice chickens to the shrines of *bhān* (servant of Māhādeu, the village god), and others offer red beans and *dhajā* asking for protection during their sojourn in India.

Usually all the migrants leaving on the same day travel together from the village; it looks like one group (there were five different groups with thirty members leaving together that day when I was there, but it looked like one group). Wherever they stop for a short time or to spend a night, they divide into small groups and the members of each group stay together; they do not mingle with other groups although they spend the night very close to one another.

First Day

The first day is very important for the migrants. They do not walk far; after three or four hours, they stop for the night. They say, "It is very difficult to be away from home for a long time, we want to be closer to our home at least for one night". Although they spend the night near their village, they cannot go back to their houses. Beginning the next morning, they walk all day, from early dawn to dusk.

Whenever the migrants stop to spend the first night, they split into small groups and the members of each group stay together to eat the *chakkauro* - all the members must bring around ten *tātyā* (flat cakes) for this occasion and they put them all on one plate. Then, the *nāike* (group leader) redistributes them among the members of his group, called *chakkauro khāne* ("to eat the *chakkauro*"). After having shared the *chakkauro*, all the group members are considered as one family until their return to the village; a member of one group cannot move into another group. Before *chakkauro* members can still change groups although it is not well regarded.

The group generally stops at wayside tea shops and close to the water so that they can cook their meal and spend the night. They do not carry tents like the Bhotya, shopkeepers provide shelter and some utensils if necessary but they must be cleaned before being returned to the owner. The group is responsible for its own water and wood. On the return trip the shopkeepers charge one rupee per person for shelter.

Organisation of the Group

Although part of the division of work can be observed on the way, it is revealed very clearly from the first night. When the group stops for the night, it divides into two sub-groups: elders and younger members: cooking and cleaning are assured by the younger members and the elders are in charge of security. Among the younger members, the youngest works more than the others. He brings water for cooking and cleaning and washes all the utensils after meals. He also has to ensure water supply on the journey. Whenever the group takes a break, *chādyā*, which lasts about half an hour, the youngest of the group has to provide drinking water for all the members. Even if the water is very close, nobody will walk to the water to drink it. Breaks are always decided by the group leader; normally a group rests after every one and one-half or two hours of walking. If someone becomes tired before, he can stop for a few minutes, *teknu*, but he will not be provided with drinking water. When meals are prepared, each member provides his share of food to be cooked collectively.

While the younger members are occupied with cooking and cleaning, the elders watch their belongings. At night they sleep

according to hierarchy. Among the elders, the youngest sleeps at the entrance, the eldest sleeps at the other extremity of the room and the middle ones sleep in the middle with the younger members. The latter are placed in the middle to protect them from thieves and bad omens. In some places, as in the lower hills, the Terai or in India, the migrants prefer to watch their belongings throughout the night; in this case, the elders assume the responsibility and let the younger members sleep.

At the end of the trading trip, the youngest receives some money (20 to 50 Indian rupees) from each member of the group as compensation for his work. There is a proverb which says "not to be the eldest at home and not to be the youngest on the trading trip" (*gharko jetho nahunu, piṭhāko kāncho nahunu*) which underscores how difficult it is to be the eldest at home because he has to look after everything and how it is difficult to be the youngest on the trading trip because he has to do most of the work.

The First Steps to India

On their arrival in Surkhet, the migrants get rid of their *ḍoko*⁵ which was used to carry food for the journey. They put it in a secure place so that they can find it on their way back. It should be noted that more than the uselessness of the basket, it designates someone as a Nepalese hill man, a stigmatisation the migrants try to avoid. Thereafter, they go to Nepalgunj by bus where they stay one or two days to borrow money. If the money can be arranged on the same day, they leave the next day for India. Indeed, most of these villagers start for India with little money and they supplement it in Nepalgunj from *baniyā* (merchants). Four merchants have long-standing business relationships with the Jumli and lend money to the Sinjāl without charging any interest. On the way back from India the Sinjāl reimburse the borrowed money and buy all the necessary cloth from the same Muslims before returning home. They have been frequenting the same merchant families for generations.

After borrowing money, they immediately leave for Gorakhpur (the largest Indian town near the border) by train. Some migrants may stay in Gorakhpur, in this case I witnessed only a small group

⁵ Bamboo basket which is carried on the back and shoulders and secured by a strap on the forehead.

of three members with more money than the others who remained in town. The others buy clothes and asafoetida with their borrowed money and set out for Indian villages selling door-to-door. They also continue to sell their "imaginative herbs" although the export of geological products and herbs from Nepal is prohibited (for details, Shrestha 1993: 103-104).

In Indian villages they seek shelter at rich men's houses, for two reasons: the first is that the shelter is free, and the second and most important, is that it provides protection. If they have any problem with the local police or if they are robbed during their stay in the village, they can always seek their host's assistance. The Jumli are very well regarded by Indian villagers. They do not know exactly where Jumla is, but they situate it somewhere in the northern mountains called *jwōlā pāhād* (blazing mountain)⁶. They think the people from the "blazing mountain" are honest and cannot cheat them. Taking advantage of their good reputation, within two or three months, the Jumli earn from 1,000 to 4,000 Indian rupees.

The Return

After two or three months the Jumli return from India. On their way home they stop in Nepalgunj to pay their debts to the shopkeepers who lent them money and to buy their necessities from them. It is not an accident to stop in Nepalgunj to buy household supplies coming from India. First it is loyalty to their money-lenders, and secondly it avoids harassment by Nepalese customs officials. It is sometimes said that the Nepalese customs officers levy duties on the cloth worn by them if it appears new. Even if it is cheaper in India, the Jumli would rather purchase their necessities in Nepalgunj to avoid customs.

To make some money from their returnee Jumli clients, a few *Damāi* (tailors) travel down to Nepalgunj with their sewing machines so that they can make clothing for them. It became a custom for those Jumli to make new outfits in Nepalgunj before heading home and they prefer to go to Jumli tailors than to a local tailor.

⁶ The name *jwōlā pāhād* is from the shrine Sire Thān where a small flame comes out of the ground and burns twenty-four hours. It is situated in Dailekh District. Once a year, in February-March, on the day of Śivratri, people from Dailekh District and its surrounding areas make a pilgrimage to this shrine.

Whatever their income is, the Jumli spend some time in Nepalgunj shopping. Their purchases consist of fabric for all the family, shoes, socks, bangles, necklaces of glass beads, sweaters, blankets, cigarettes, matches, spices, oil, sugar, molasses, utensils, soap, iron ingots and some sweets for the children. After purchasing the essentials, if money remains, they buy gold and silver for the women; usually they do not return with money.

In the village families become increasingly anxious if the trading groups do not come back within the normal time frame. The children may even go one or two villages further down to wait for the *hathauro*. When they get back, they receive *tikā* from their mothers before they enter their homes. Then all the children and young women of their own lineage come to see what they have brought back from the trading trip, receiving molasses as a gift from the returnee. From the next day, they go to visit their close relatives in the village and take some molasses for the women and cigarettes for the men.

This paper differs from the seasonal and temporary migrations explained by Gaborieau (1978), Toffin (1978), Muller (1990) and Bishop (1993). It elucidates the complex organisation of the trading cycle from Botā, Sinjā Valley. In Botā and Sinjā Valley, migration is a group phenomenon and only men participate. It coincides with the agricultural cycle. Every year the Botāl go to India at the same period in October/November after the agricultural work and they come back in February/March to begin the cycle. They stop in Nepalgunj on the way to India to borrow money and on the way back to reimburse the money and to buy necessities. It is one of the ways to sustain their lives in the village.

What is remarkable in Sinjāl migration is its codification and ritualization. The trip is not accidental but rather a fixed peregrination. It is totally integrated in village life, showing that it is a traditional practice.

In recent years, more and more villagers go to India to compensate income caused by the loss of livestock due to the Rārā National Park. Despite their regular contact with the urban world, their socio-religious life in the village is scarcely different than their grandparents', as Gaborieau states for Samjur village in Central

Nepal, "la vie qu'ils trouvent au village, la cinquantaine passée, n'est guère différente de celle qu'ils avaient connue dans leur jeunesse".

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