

**Geoff Childs and Namgyal Choedup. 2019. *From a Trickle to a Torrent: Education, Migration, and Social Change in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal*. Oakland: University of California Press.**

*From a Trickle to a Torrent* is an ethnography based on a two-decade-long longitudinal study of the residents of Nubri in northern part of Gorkha District. The main thrust of the book is an analysis of the migration of young children outside their village for education as it relates to social networks of migration and social change.

The book consists of ten chapters. The first chapter introduces the study area, the people, and the research methodology. Nubri people—totaling 3,500—are portrayed as engaged in cultivating potatoes and maize, although they were engaged in trans-Himalayan trade in the past. The authors have used the lens of migration network theory in anthropological demography to analyze migration and social change. The second chapter deals with linkages between Tibet and Nepal from the point of view of Nubri, including political changes, immigration of clerics from Tibet, and the completion of Buddhist transformation of Nubri people such as through renunciation of animal sacrifice.

The third chapter discusses Nubri households in the context of a local administrative system that binds people to the village through taxes and communal obligations. The authors detail, along with national laws, local laws such as golden yoke of Gyaltrim (royal or national law), iron ring of Yultrim (village law), and silken knot of Chotrim (religious law) for maintaining the sense of common identity and for local governance. They also describe how Nubri residents migrate seasonally to Kathmandu to conduct rituals and recite religious texts for Buddhists in the country's capital. But the authors do not present quantitative information of adult migration and economic returns from ritual performance in Kathmandu. They argue that

such a migration links them to a larger Buddhist community and facilitates the development of social networks for migration of children.

Chapter Four concerns the story of Tibetan exiles after China reasserted control over Tibet in the early 1950s and the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 with roughly 120,000 followers. Thereafter, many secular and religious institutions were established in India and Nepal to educate the exiled children. Gradually, such institutions also started enrolling Nubri children. This, along with fertility rate higher than rate of mortality, was the cause of outmigration of Nubri people. The rates of youth outmigration for both general and monastic education are extremely high: about 74 percent of males and 72 percent of females aged 10 to 19 no longer reside with their parents.

Chapters five to eight deal with the ethnographic core of the study. They detail the migration of children from rural Nubri to urban areas such as Kathmandu and those in India to become monks or nuns and for secular education in reference to two assumptions of migration network theory: migration is not a random event but is shaped by social networks, and social networks reduce the costs and risks of migration. For Nubri residents, becoming a monk means “separation from family as a prerequisite for pursuing the altruistic goal of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings” (p. 70).

There are economic and social connections between monks and their natal households, which is explored in the fifth chapter. Monks remain economically connected to their kin. While many parents send their sons to monasteries in Kathmandu to ensure better futures for them, some parents do so to repent for their own sins.

Unlike becoming a monk, becoming a nun does not hold large economic significance. Nuns do not have high positions in monasteries, nor do they have an extra income. The significance of becoming a nun is primarily social: to have a better life, to gain spiritual merit, and to stay away from hard labor symbolized by “a rope on her head” (p. 93). Nubri residents consider a nun to be a server in a family, one who remains with her old parents and provides services without opting to marry. But this perception has been changing in many places, albeit slightly. Nuns in Kathmandu, in addition to reading Buddha’s teachings to be good disciples, read the texts of general education streams like English and science. So, now the nuns are considered not only as social servers but also (and beyond) as disciples of Buddha.

Chapter Seven is about secular education and participation of Nubri people in the formal education system of Nepal. The authors highlight

problems of government schools, including Nepali language (which is not the mother tongue of Nubri children) being the medium of teaching and learning in schools, and failure of private schools to check outmigration of students from Nubri. The authors' application of Mark Granovetter's concept of "strong" and "weak" ties in migration is interesting. Parents send their children to city-based schools through close kin connection with monks or school administrators; this is a strong tie. Besides, there are foreign sponsors (*jindag*) connected through school administration; this is a weak tie. These strong and weak ties are responsible for outmigration of Nubri children for secular and monastic education. However, such outmigrated children belong to comparatively better socio-economic backgrounds rather than the poor ones. Given this, the authors raise the question of whether secular education is reproducing inequality in the village.

Chapter Eight discusses household succession quandary. Educated children seldom return to their village to become household successors, which is common in rural Nepal. The authors argue that many educated children are reluctant to go back to the village due to lack of opportunities, but social recognition and economic opportunities of conducting rituals in the village and in Kathmandu induce them to quit their religious celibacy and even return home. Regarding women, the authors consider capture (forced) marriage practice and ineligibility in parental property as barriers for educated daughters to return back to the village. This might have been the case in the mid-1980s when the study started, but it is hard to believe that this remained so at the end of the study in the mid-2000, given the political and social changes that have taken place during that time.

Chapter Nine discusses the transformative potential of educational migration. It seems that educational migration of the youth is the primary cause of social change in Nubri because children sent to private schools and monasteries are socialized through various agents and institutions. Correspondingly, parents who decide to send their children either to schools or monasteries are the primary agents of social and demographic changes in Nubri. The authors argue that modernization has an influence on lower fertility rate. However, youths of Nubri prefer endogamous marriages rather than marrying with high caste Brahman-Chhetri or others who are non-Buddhists or have non-pan-Tibetan ethnic identity.

Educational migration in Nubri has both positive and negative effects. The children speak multiple languages and easily adapt themselves to different

socio-cultural circumstances. The use of social networks not only brought them together but also served as a way of expressing their thoughts, ideas, and knowledge, although they are outside the rural community. On the other hand, the negative effects are alarming; notably, loss of local dialect, lack of religious practitioners and hence rituals in the village, and changing perception of village people towards rituals and lamas as ritual specialists. In this context, the authors, in the last chapter of the book, raise the question of Nubri's future.

The books' migration network theory framework ignores the pull and push of the economy, including in the case of the migration of adults. Moreover, there is little discussion of old peoples' adaptation in Nubri, and nothing on whether the sons and daughters in Kathmandu would bring their parents to the capital for permanent settlement. Such a discussion would have given a fuller picture of Nubri households.

That said, the book is a milestone in the demographic anthropology of the Nepal Himalayas. Methodologically, the ample case studies and quotations of conversations not only supplement the authors' arguments but also provide a real picture of people, places, and objects. As such, it deserves to be read widely.

**Khadga Narayan Shrestha**  
Tri-chandra College