

From a Trickle to a Torrent: Education, Migration and Social Change in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal. By Geoff Childs and Namgyal Choedup

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From a Trickle to a Torrent: Education, Migration and Social Change in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal. By Geoff Childs and Namgyal Choedup

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The interconnection between migration and education has been widely researched globally. However, few published studies have reported this phenomenon with regard to rural communities—particularly in the context of Nepal. Therefore, this book by Geoff Childs and Namgyal Choedup is a welcome contribution to the field. It documents outmigration for education as a complex flow and evolution of migration with potentially serious consequences, based on more than 20 years of anthropological multimethod research (using ethnographic and statistical data) in Nubri, a valley north of the Gorkha district, Nepal, bordering Tibet—a “Buddhist enclave” (p 5), as the authors note. The authors primarily draw on migration network theory to examine outmigration for education, weaving together aspects of social, economic, and cultural practices.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. Chapter 1 begins by depicting the arduous journey of a widowed mother, Tsering Lhamo, climbing uphill, indicating the suffering of many parents in Nubri when they send their children to a school or a monastery far away. It provides background to the study reported in the book, building on Childs’s work in the 1990s, and explains theories and concepts underpinning the study. In Chapter 2, the authors provide a historical perspective on the people and culture of Nubri, connecting it with Tibet and Buddhism. The chapter draws on historical papers and oral histories to show the migration of 3 *lama* lineages to Nubri and their contributions to Buddhism, which seem to have had far-reaching effects on Nubri and beyond.

Chapter 3 presents a case study of Trok, one of the villages of Nubri, and gives an account of its thriving sociocultural and religious activities. The authors helpfully use the concept of household as locally practiced (anyone currently living and absent but returning members in the house) to examine social changes, economic activities, and migration trends. The chapter clearly depicts how households come together to contribute to the costs of

running religious celebrations in 5 Buddhist temples throughout the year. It also shows how many household heads have turned into religious seasonal workers in Kathmandu in the winter months, which has paved the way for outmigration.

Chapter 4 starts by painting the picture of outmigration of youths (both boys and girls) from Nubri to urban destinations, such as Kathmandu, for religious or secular education. It also provides an account of the plight of parents residing in Nubri, where the outmigration of youths has led to a shortage of the labor force for farming. The authors link this outmigration with the declining number of children in the Tibetan exile communities and their changing priorities in South Asia, as well as with the close cultural and religious ties of the Nubri people with Tibet. The authors conclude that this outmigration trend comes with both benefits and costs to the Nubri community.

Chapter 5 explores the sociological and economic relationships between a Nubri monk (*lama*) and his natal household. It begins with case studies of 2 Nubri men who chose to become monks. These case studies show the prevalent tension between leading or supporting a family and pursuing a monastic life, as well as how these 2 men dealt with different challenges in the process. The chapter then moves on to exploring the motives of parents for sending their children to monasteries for religious education—including Buddhist tradition, cleansing sins, a better life, and financial benefits. It also considers mass monasticism. Chapter 6 presents parental motivations for making their daughters nuns and women’s own reasons for choosing this life path. In contrast to men’s reasons for becoming monks, nuns are “forced” to look after their parents and be part of worldly activities rather than monastic studies. The authors argue that nuns have a lower status than monks in Nubri society.

Chapter 7 explores the phenomenon of Nubri children studying in secular schools outside Nubri. This trend seems to have been influenced by many factors, especially the lack of well-resourced schools in remote Nubri, national politics (ie, Maoist revolution), and parental attitudes toward education. The authors examine this phenomenon through the notions of strong and weak ties between parents and their social networks, particularly monks living in cities like Kathmandu. They rightly argue that this could perpetuate social inequalities.

Connecting with the monastic and secular education of Nubri children, Chapter 8 examines household successions and arranged marriages, which demonstrate the adaptability of Nubri parents in a constantly changing society within and outside Nubri. It shows how both parents and monastic institutions adapted to household needs for a monk son to become a *dralog* (monk returned as a layperson) after a period of monastic education and training. In contrast, young women seem to have been able to make spousal choices after education in cities, despite pressure from parents for an arranged marriage.

Chapter 9 presents the demographic impacts of educational migration on individuals, families, and society. The authors compellingly use the notion of fosterage to describe the transfer of parenting of Nubri children from parents to boarding schools and monasteries in cities. They argue that a noticeable impact is the declining fertility of women as a result of delayed marriage and women becoming nuns. Another influence is on marriage, which has increasingly become a collaborative practice between parents and their offspring to ensure similar ethnicity (Tibetan) and religion (Buddhism). The authors convincingly refute the simplistic link between modernization (education) and individualism in today's Nubri society.

Based on trends and the demographic impact of outmigration, the final chapter describes what futures Nubri society will have. The authors argue that educational outmigration—whether for monastic or for secular

education—has had an adverse effect on culturally appropriate elderly care, religious celebrations, and the continuity of Nubri cultural traditions in Nubri and that this social transformation is probably irreversible. However, it has enabled Nubri youths to find new and better opportunities and to possess multilingual resources (Tibetan, Nepali, and English), which means that they will have a better life than their parents.

Overall, this book presents a rare account of a Himalayan Buddhist society in Nepal that has been undergoing social transformation as a result of the desire of parents for their children's education and better life. It is written lucidly and contributes to the fields of migration and education from an ethnographic perspective. The book is an indispensable resource for scholars working in migration studies and educational research in rural areas.