

Migration Patterns and Experiences of K Villagers

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Abstract This study aims to understand the rural development of K Village through the concept of migration. In particular, the study intends to obtain a better understanding of the migration patterns and mobility experiences of the local people, their reason for settling in K Village, and the prospective migration plans of the younger generation. The informants of this study are categorized into three groups, according to their migration experiences. They are grouped as 1) returned migrants, 2) immigrants or in-bound migrants, and 3) left-behind family (of out-bound migrants). Returned migrants consist of retired army personnel who opted to return to K Village in order to spend their retirement years, while receiving a pension from the government. Some of them also engage in local businesses in the village. Immigrants or in-bound migrants are those who are originally from neighboring areas or states, or even foreign countries but settled in K Village, together with their families. Their reasons for choosing K Village are varied. These include job transfers, retirement, and spiritual attachment to the place. As for the left-behind family, one or two of their family members are presently living outside K Village and often return to the village for special family occasions such as weddings or birthdays. Their migrant family members do send remittances back to them. The effect of their remittances is seen in the lifestyle development of the left-behind families in the form of newly constructed houses and new house appliances.

Key words migration patterns, mobility experiences, gender roles, family formation

I. Introduction

The dynamics of migration has been an integral issue in development discussion. According to studies conducted in K Village in the state of Uttarakhand, India, it was found that the demography and ethnography of “hill regions” in the state have been influenced by a large in-migration from other parts of the mainland, during the 11th and 12th century onwards (Atkinson, 1882; Walton, 1910). Meanwhile, according to Okahashi (2014), due to limited employment in industries other than agriculture, the region experienced an outflow of people, seeking employment elsewhere, by the end of the 19th century. More often than not, the head of the household would leave his family behind, in order to work as a migrant laborer, and send back remittances to his family; Khanka (1988) referred to such an economy as “Money Order Economy.”

To give a clearer picture of the current migration patterns of the local people in one of the mountainous areas of Uttarakhand, a study was conducted in K Village (hereafter, referred to as K Village) in Nainital, to understand the present development taking place in the region and to propose recommendations to the local village. Issues such as the development of local tourism, problems regarding water supply and availability of clean water, preservation of landscape and agriculture, and migration, are touched upon in the research.

In particular, the topic, “Migration Patterns and Experi-

ences of K Villagers,” which was the focus of my field survey, aims to understand the rural development of K Village through the concept of migration. This study intends to obtain a better understanding of the migration patterns and mobility experiences of the local people, their reasons for settling in K Village, and the prospective migration plans of the younger generation, by providing case studies of selected migrants. I narrowed down my questions to their personal experiences and tried to contextualize their answers. *Why did they choose to reside in K Village? What were the significant changes in the community since they (im)migrated? What are the perceptions of the left-behind family members of migrants?*

In the following sections, I will explain the methodology of the thematic survey and its limitation, and accordingly elucidate the demographic profile of the respondents in the primary and secondary surveys. I will also discuss the case studies in the following paragraph. In this section, I will explain the background of the respondents, their migration experiences (before and after settling in K Village), and the perceptions of the left-behind family members of migrants. Additionally, I will incorporate in this study the perceptions of the younger generation, whose household heads are returned migrants (ex army), and their prospective plans to emigrate from K Village in the future. This way, I will be able to generate an overview of their migration patterns and factors affecting their decision to (im)migrate.

II. Methodology

The fieldwork in K Village was conducted from March 7–10, 2017. As mentioned above, groups were divided according to the desired topics, namely, migration (one member), agriculture and landscape (two members), tourism (two members), and water (two members). Local translators were also present throughout the course of fieldwork in order to communicate with the local people and translate whenever necessary.

For the first two days, a general household survey was conducted. A structured survey questionnaire was utilized to obtain general information of the village households. The goal of this primary survey was to identify prospective informants for follow-up interviews and observe the household by group, in the following days. In order to obtain the general information of the village households, a meeting with all the group members (after the first survey) was conducted, to discuss the output of the primary survey. The objective of the meeting was to obtain basic information of the prospective respondents for the follow-up thematic surveys.

In the secondary survey, a thematic (semi-structured) survey questionnaire was utilized to obtain a clearer picture of the migration patterns of the selected respondents, and interviews were administered soon after, to understand the perceptions of the (im)migrants and their left-behind family members towards migration. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy and identities of the informants.

During the fieldwork, I categorized my questions into two parts: the first part is for immigrants, or those who (im)migrated to reside in K Village (known as in-bound migration); it includes their birthplace, year of settlement, occupation before (im)migrating, and the reason for migration. The second part is for the left-behind family whose members migrated outside K Village. The questions revolve around the reasons for migration of the migrant family members and their perception of the migration process. In his paper on *The Transformation of a Himalayan Mountain Village under the Rapid Economic Growth in India*, Okahashi (2016, p.10) stated that remittances, sent back by the migrant family members, support the households and local economies, “but the outflow of the active workforce has a negative impact on industrial development.” This study, however, does not intend to identify the negative impact of the outflow of the active workforce on industrial development per se. Rather, it seeks to contribute to the discussion of the impact of the remittances by examining the perceptions of the left-

behind members.

III. Background of the Respondents

We conducted the survey in K Village, which is situated on a hill, at an elevation of 1,635 m., with a small lake located in the center of the village. According to the 2011 census (Census of India 2011, p. 125), K Village, where K Hamlet belongs, has a total of 321 households and a population of 1,552. In this study, our group conducted a survey of 75 households in the village. As shown in Table 1, out of 75 households, at the time of the survey, 52 belong to the Rajput caste—the dominant caste in the study, 10 households belong to the Brahmin caste, and 11 households belong to the Scheduled caste, while two households belong to Muslims and one to a foreign immigrant.

The occupations of the heads of the households range from cultivators, which is the dominating occupation, to pension holders, retired army personnel, government employees, small business owners, high court workers, and a few manual laborers.

In my thematic survey, I interviewed a total of eight households of which three belong to retired army personnel, four are of immigrants—where three families have come from other regions and one from France—and, one household whose family members emigrated from K Village. In order to protect the information of my respondents, I have used pseudonyms, throughout this paper, for the heads of the households and their family members. I labeled the households HH-A to HH-I, in order to identify each household in the case study. My respondents are grouped according to their jati (Hindu caste). There are three respondents for Brahman and Rajput castes respectively, two for Muslim households, and one with no data.

Subsequently, the respondents are grouped according to the migration patterns of the head of the household. Their migration can be attributed mainly to their socio-economic status based on their occupation. The three householders (hereafter, referred to as HH-A, HH-B, and HH-C), under the group of returned migrants, worked in the Indian army from 1965 to 2004.

Table 1. Distribution of households per jati

Jati	No. of HH	Total No. of HH	Percentage
Brahman	10	75	13%
Rajput	52	75	69%
Scheduled Caste (SC)	11	75	15%
Muslim	2	75	3%

Source: GHS data collected by the Taoyaka onsite training in March 2017

Unlike the returned migrants—whose migration pattern began from living in K Village, before migration, to eventually returning to the same place—the immigrants, at the time of the survey, belonged to various backgrounds that fueled their migration. The two households (HH-D and HH-E), comprising Muslim families, immigrated to K Village due to job transfer of the heads of the household (government school staff and local driver, respectively). Meanwhile, one household (HH-F) comprised of a French migrant and her student from Chennai, who came to live in the village for spiritual meditation. I also interviewed a household (HH-G) in Rajesh Vihar, which is a newly constructed military village inside K Village, in order to acquire a better understanding of the lifestyle of the community within another community.

As stated above, one household (HH-H) represents the left-behind family members. I chose to interview this household because of its relatively large number of family members living outside the village.

In the following section, I intend to discuss the case studies of each group of migrants in K Village. Fieldwork notes and informant narratives have been utilized to provide a general overview of the perceptions of the migrants in the village. I intend to provide an in-depth study focusing on the migrants' lives in the village and their contribution to their community and the local village as a whole.

IV. Case Studies

1. Returned migrants

Previous studies by Khanka (1988) and Okahashi (2014) noted that families in K Village received significant remittances from their family members who are migrant workers. This phenomenon started by the end of the 19th century when people in the village were seeking opportunities to elevate their economic resources by finding work outside their homeland. These economic resources, in the form of remittances, are sent back to the village and benefit the families left-behind. Newly constructed homes

and the presence of advanced electronic appliances, such as televisions and washing machines are testimony to this development.

HH-A, B, and C are families of the retired army head of the household who was receiving pension at the time of the survey. To provide an overall picture of their past movements, the following table sums up the migration patterns of the three households.

As shown in the table above, the heads of the households worked in the army in their early twenties and retired in their early 40s or 50s. After their service, the retired army personnel, together with their families, opted to return to K Village to settle down. They are currently receiving a pension which is their primary source of income. It should also be noted that the heads of the households originally lived in K Village prior to their out-migration.

An interesting case is of MP, who is the head of HH-A, and moved from K Village with the rest of his family, throughout his stint in the army. As a result, the family continued to move from one place to another. This is revealed by the birthplaces of his children. AP, his oldest son was born in Assam while VJ, the second son, was born in Lucknow, three years later. At present, AP is studying hotel management in Delhi and visits his family twice a year. VJ is in the 11th grade and studies in Nainital. Interestingly, VJ would like to join the army after acquiring the required education, and follow in his father's footsteps by serving his country. Now, MP manages his own shop in the village.

2. Immigrants (in-bound migrants)

As noted above, the two Muslim households I interviewed came to settle in the K Village because of the job transfer of the heads of the households. It is interesting to note that these two households are a minority group in terms of their religion. In a village where caste structure is dominant, the two households, who are also related by blood, live in harmony with people of other castes. When

Table 2. Migration background of returned migrants

Name	Relationship to Head of the Household (HH)	Current Occupation	Birthplace	Reason for Out-migration	Year of Out-migration from K Village	Age at the time of Out-migration	Year of Return to K Village	Age at the time of Return
HH-A	HH	Local Shop Owner (receiving pension)	K Village	Army- Posted to Lucknow and Assam	1984	21	2001	38
HH-B	HH	Retired Army (receiving Pension)	K Village	Army-Posted to Assam	1980	21	2004	48
HH-C	HH	Retired Army (receiving pension)	K Village	Army-Posted to Udampur and Rajasthan	1965	20	1987	42

Source: GHS data and individual survey data collected by the Taoyaka onsite training in March 2017

asked how they adapted in their new community, the informants pointed out that they were invited to weddings and Hindu festivals that made them feel welcome. At the time of the survey, the villagers were celebrating Holi, a Hindu spring festival that is widely celebrated in India. The informant elucidated that participating in such festivals is a way of socializing with the people in the village. Also, SH, the wife of the head of HH-D, stated, “*We celebrate all the festivals here, like Holi and Diwali. However, we also hold Muslim rituals and events such as Ramadan in our household.*”

Consequently, I also asked the households about their initial years in the village. In retrospect, SL, wife of the head of HH-E, felt that they were not accepted by the people in the village. However, she also emphasized that their experiences then, were different from their experiences now. The feeling of being unwelcome changed over time, and they overcame such feeling by participating in the local events. She continued that it is different now because they feel more comfortable staying in the village like they are surrounded with family.¹

On the other hand, SS of HH-G is a retired army man and teacher who served for 16 and 9 years, respectively, before moving to Rajesh Vihar,² an Army Welfare Housing Organization (AWHO) property for serving/retired members of the Army and their widows. Rajesh Vihar was fully constructed in 2008 and included a total of 78 flats out of which 74 flats were sold to mostly retired people from the cities of Delhi, Noida, and Bengaluru. At the time of the visit to the community, only one person was currently living in the flats. I was informed that people only came to stay there during summer and winter vacations, making the place their rest house. Curious about the life inside the community, I interviewed SS, the person who lives in Rajesh Vihar.

SS came from Delhi and migrated to K Village in 2014 after receiving two pensions, one from the army and the other from his teaching job. He lives alone in the village while his two children work in Delhi and Australia. He chose AWHO in K Village because of its peaceful environment, but was frustrated with the increasing amount of garbage in the village. He expressed his love for the environment (holds a MS degree in Disaster Mitigation) and wrote a book that highlights the adverse effects of biotechnology and the chemical revolution on environment. He is dedicated to helping the people of K Village. One time, he gave umbrellas to students of the local school. During the interview, he showed me copies of letters of all the complaints he had filed with the local government. One example is of the illegal construction of a building in the

public forest just east of the AWHO Village. He said that because the forest is public property, private construction is illegal and damages its natural landscape.

In a separate case, C is a French migrant and a master of meditation (HH-F). She first came to India in 1998 following her great master. In 2008, C along with SH, her student from Chennai, moved to K Village for spiritual meditation in the Himalayas. K Village is situated in the Himalayan Mountains of India, and it is for this reason that C and SH decided to live in the village. When I asked about her relationship with the local people, she explained, “*At the beginning, it was rather open and nice. But very quickly, we started having problems with swindlers because I am from the west and they think that I have money; it has been difficult. After, we met very nice people too. They asked me why I chose this house which is in the worst part of K. Since then, we have had lots of problems. We have problems because we are not Hindu. I was born in France while Christianity is rarely seen in India. SH is born Hindu but now we prefer meditation which is linked directly to God... we have problems because we do not accept the ideals of Hinduism. For example, they do “puja” (black magic), to invoke spirits. And this activity is spoiling the atmosphere, you can’t imagine... a lot of puja was done against us but we are fully protected by our meditation... this makes us sad because we are not imposing meditation on anybody. We just want to be in contact with nature, the Himalayas...*”

In the above narrative, according to C, because of her “not being Hindu,” she encountered problems while living in K Village. The “ethnic” difference in the rural village is problematic from the perspective of a foreign immigrant. However, their meditation and spiritual attachment to the Himalayas has made them stay. Further studies, however, should be conducted in order to gain an understanding into the perceptions of the local villagers. In comparison to the Muslim households, whom I have talked to, this household is unique. It is also noted that despite their unsatisfactory relationship with the local people, it is their spiritual connection to the place that brought them to the village. I think that this is something that can contribute to the migration studies of the local village in terms of their experiences and perceptions.

The following table summarizes the migration background of immigrants (or in-bound migrants) to K Village.

3. Left-behind family members

DE is the head of HH-H. Her two sons and two daughters-in-law live in Bhimtal and Nainital, respectively because of their jobs. DE, a mother of three, encouraged

Table 3. Migration background of in-bound migrants

Name	Relationship to Head of the Household (HH)	Current Occupation	Birthplace	Reason for In-migration	Year of In-bound migration to KVillage	Age at the time of In-migration	Occupation before settling to KVillage
HH-D	HH	Local driver	Ranikhet	Job transfer	2011	35	Shopkeeper
HH-E	HH	Teacher	Someshwar	Job transfer	1990	40	Private job at Nainital
HH-F	HH	Spiritual meditation teacher	France	Spiritual connection to the place	2008	36	Music teacher in France
HH-G	HH	Retired army	Haryana	Retirement place	2014	62	Teacher/ Army

Source: GHS data and individual survey data collected by the Taoyaka onsite training in March 2017

her children to move outside the village to look for better opportunities. When asked, who will take care of her farmland, she mentioned that she would hire laborers to attend to her land. Also, BS of HH-C elucidated the impact of migration on the family. The family built their house from the remittances sent by their migrant family members. Remittances, sent back home by migrant workers, still create an impact on the household (Khanka, 1988).

Most of the families I have interviewed are actually left-behind families. Usually, the children live in other places and often visit the family in the village during special occasions such as weddings. Apart from seeking employment and better education, the mothers elucidated that they would want their children to emigrate from the village for their “*personality development*.” For them, having their children live outside their households would help them become “*independent*” and explore more opportunities. The following section justifies this statement from the perspective of the younger generation.

4. Prospective migration pattern of young generation

I interviewed VJ who is the son of a retired army man. He plans to enter the army just like his father. I asked if he wants to return to the village like his father and he mentioned that, “living with the rest of my relatives is a problem for me. I want to become independent.” He further said, “I don’t like this place. I don’t like the people. I am not staying here. I don’t feel independent. I have aunts and uncles living in the area and that is my problem. They are too possessive. That is why I want to move outside KVillage.” During the interview, I observed, and I was told as well, that people in the village are related to each other. All the wives that I interviewed are marriage migrants themselves who have come from different villages and regions. By looking into VJ’s narrative, we can see how young people think about migrating, in the hopes of becoming independent from their family. By following in his father’s

footsteps, he thinks that joining the army, and living outside the village, far from his family, is the best idea for him now.

The Indian family is considered strong, stable, close, resilient, and enduring (Mullatti, 1995). The traditional, ideal, and desired family in India is the joint family. A joint family consists of three to four living generations, including extended families like uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household. The joint family has always been the preferred family type in the Indian culture, and most Indians, at some point in their lives, have lived in a joint family setting (Nandan and Eames, 1980). Due to the advent of urbanization and modernization, younger generations are turning away from the joint family system. Some scholars specify that the *modified extended family* has replaced the traditional joint family, in that it does not demand geographical proximity or occupational involvement and does not have a hierarchical authority structure (Nandan and Eames, 1980; Mullatti, 1995).

V. Conclusive Remarks

In conclusion, this paper aims to understand the general picture of rural development in KVillage through the concept of migration. Specifically, it intends to obtain a better understanding of the migration patterns of the local people and to provide case studies of selected migrants in the village on their migration experiences.

My respondents are grouped according to their migration patterns: returned migrants, immigrants, and left-behind family. All respondents represent the caste structures in the village, in which two respondents are Brahmins, three are Rajputs, two are Muslims, and one is a foreign immigrant. Some respondents showed ambivalent feelings toward their migration. Muslim households felt that they were accepted in the community despite their religious belief but the foreign immigrant household felt rather unsatisfied with the result of her migration. We

can conclude that ethnic differences can still be seen as a problem, if not by the locals, then by the immigrants themselves. For returned migrants, the heads of the households mostly receive government pension which is their primary source of income. It is observed that the village has housed “pension-receiving” households in the last 10 to 15 years because of the presence of retired army personnel in K Village. However, as to what extent the pensioners impact the village is something that needs to be investigated in future studies.

The above case studies show the diverse experiences of local people. In qualitative research, the perceptions of migrants allow us to understand their lives in the village and the factors that affect their decision to migrate. A good example is the case of VJ who wants to emigrate or move out from K Village someday. He narrated that living with the rest of his family became problematic and migrating elsewhere could be the solution. The structure of a traditional Indian family not only becomes the reason for migration, because of the movement of people outside the traditional family structure, but the family structure itself becomes the result of migration.

It is also observed that mothers play a vital role in the migration of their children as they encourage them to move in order to “seek better opportunities” and “develop their personality.” Finally, this paper contributes to studies of migrant perspectives in K Village. Understanding their experiences would allow us to identify factors of development and changes in the village.

End Notes

1. This data is taken from the fieldwork notes during the fieldwork

conducted last March 10, 2017 at Khurpatal village, Nainital, Uttarakhand, India.

2. Rajesh Vihar is an Army Welfare Housing Organisation property for serving/retired members of the Army and their widows. It is named in the memory of Nainital's Kargil martyr Major Rajesh Singh Adhikari, MVC-18 Grenadiers-2 Mech Inf, (25 Dec 1970-30 May 1999). <https://www.apnacompex.com/complex/rajesh-vihar> (accessed February 20, 2017)

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