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The Nepalese Diaspora in Canada: History, Diasporic Experiences, and Contemporary Issues

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Abstract: Despite the Nepalese diaspora being a part of the South Asian diaspora in Canada—the largest fraction of Canadian diasporas—systematic investigations into and knowledge about the Nepalese diaspora is strikingly limited. The existing studies centred on the South Asian diaspora predominantly deal with the Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Bangladeshi diasporas and often homogenize the Nepalese diaspora with these diasporic groups. This study, as the first scholarly investigation into this group, examines the emerging and fast-growing Nepalese diasporic community in Canada. Based on government data, reports, and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this article presents the history of the Nepalese diaspora in Canada. It also delineates their diasporic experiences as they arrive and embark on a new journey to Canada and some contemporary socio-cultural and intergenerational issues that have arisen in this diasporic community. The article finds a rapid growth in the Nepalese diaspora in about the last two decades. It identifies the quest for a better life, health care, social security, children's education, and escape from political turmoil and instability in their native country as the chief reasons for this influx of Nepalese in Canada. The article also uncovers dramatic career shifts, adaptation or settlement-related strains, longing for homeland, cultural decline, and growing intergenerational gaps as the key post-immigration challenges encountered by the Nepalese diaspora in Canada.

Keywords: Nepalese diaspora; Canada; history; diasporic experiences; contemporary issues

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1. Introduction

In Canada, "South Asian diasporas" generally refers to the people who immigrated from the Indian Subcontinent and its constituent countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. South Asian diasporas are one among the many visible minority groups in Canada as defined by the 1995 Canadian Employment Equity Act—"persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Government of Canada 1995). The history of the South Asian diaspora can be traced to the early twentieth century (e.g., Coward 2000; R. Ghosh 2017; Hawkins 1991; Johnston 1984). However, due to a racialized immigration policy, the South Asian diasporic population remained static until the 1950s. The immigration of South Asians accelerated after the elimination of racial criteria in the Canadian Immigration Act in 1962 and the introduction of a points system based on language, education, and occupational skills (Coward 2000; S. Ghosh 2013; R. Ghosh 2017; Hawkins 1991; Johnston 1984). Today, the South Asian diaspora constitutes 7.1% (2,571,400) of the total population (36,991,981) of Canada, making them the largest visible minority group in Canada (Statistics Canada 2023).

Despite the Nepalese diaspora being a part of the largest immigrant entity in Canada, the systematic investigation of and knowledge about the Nepalese diaspora is strikingly

limited. Many studies centre on the South Asian diaspora, but most of them homogenize the Nepalese diaspora with the Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Bangladeshi diasporas (Giri 2023). There is a significant gap in the availability of data and research regarding this diasporic group in Canada, including their immigration history, immigration phases, situation, socio-economic and socio-cultural status, employment, income, and other factors after their arrival in Canada, other than their population statistics in Census Canada. Based on the rapid growth in the past two decades, the Nepalese diasporic community has revealed itself as an emerging and fast-growing South Asian diasporic community in Canada. Considering this fact, although its population size is relatively small at present, a systematic probing appears essential to understanding this diasporic community. Furthermore, the outcome of this study has great potential in the context of understanding and comparing the global Nepalese diaspora, specifically the neighbouring Nepalese diasporic community in the United States. For example, a recent study by Thapa-Oli and Yang (2024) chronicles the Nepalese diasporic community in the United States, which started as a small number and has risen phenomenally (over 167,000) since 2000. Their study presents adaptation strategies (cultural, structural, marital, identificational, and receptional) developed by the Nepalese diaspora in the United States.

In this light, this article examines the Nepalese diaspora, focusing on three key facets: (1) the community's history, (2) the community's diasporic experiences, and (3) the community's contemporary issues. First, the article investigates the following questions: What is the historical development of Nepalese immigration to Canada? What are the chief reasons behind their immigration? What are the key immigration phases of the Nepalese diaspora? What is the demographic composition and socio-economic status of the Nepalese diasporic community in Canada? Second, this article probes the following questions: What is life like for the Nepalese diaspora in Canada? What are their key post-immigration-related issues? What aspects of homeland do they miss most after immigration? Third, the article interrogates the following: What are the post-immigration race-related, settlement-related, and mental well-being-related challenges in the Nepalese diasporic community? What are the socio-cultural and intergenerational gaps in the Nepalese diasporic community?

"Diaspora" is an unsettled term, and there is an ongoing debate regarding its definition in the social sciences. The use of the "diaspora" concept in this article is based on the classic three core elements model: dispersion, homeland orientation, and collective memory (Brubaker 2005; Butler 2001; Safran 1991; Tölölyan 2007). The Nepalese diaspora evokes its original definition as well as its subsequent expanded concept (after the 1980s) of trading diaspora and labour diaspora (Cohen 2008).

The following section succinctly describes the materials and methods used to conduct this study. The subsequent three major sections present the results of this study, outlining the history, diasporic experience, and contemporary issues of the Nepalese diaspora, respectively. The discussion and conclusions section interprets the results, summarizes the key findings, links the findings to the larger studies on those issues, discusses the implications of the findings, and suggests potential areas for future research.

2. Materials and Methods

The data for this study come from multiple sources—government censuses, reports, reviews of the available literature, and in-depth interviews with the Nepalese diasporic community in Canada. The national and provincial population data, immigration patterns, demographic compositions, geographic concentration, and history of the Nepalese (in particular) and South Asian peoples (in general) are mainly adopted from the 1911–2021 Statistics Canada Censuses of Canada. Some of the key literature and reports have also been referenced in this respect. The diasporic experiences data are obtained from semi-structured interviews with the first-generation Nepalese diasporic community members

and representatives who are in their mid-thirties to mid-sixties and immigrated to Canada between the 1980s and recent years. The interviews were carried out from November 2019 to April 2022 with a year-long pause between March 2020 and March 2021 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of sixty-one community members participated in the interview, and they were recruited through various community organization referrals and advertisements on flyers/posters and social media. These interviews were mainly conducted with the community members currently residing in Edmonton, Alberta. However, many of these interviewees have moved to Edmonton from various provinces across Canada, such as Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The interviews were twenty-five minutes to an hour long and the questions were open-ended. The interviews were audio recorded and an informed consent form was collected from the interviewees. However, for the protection and privacy of the research participants, pseudonyms have been used throughout this article. The interview data were in both English and Nepalese languages. The English language data have been transcribed and the Nepalese language data have been transcribed and translated into English.

3. History of the Nepalese Diaspora in Canada

The earliest dispersion movements of the Nepalese diaspora date back to the seventeenth century (to the Tibetan cities of Shigatse, Gyantse, and Lhasa). The dispersion movement multiplied after the formation of modern Nepal in the mid to late eighteenth century, when the Gorkhali king Prithvi Narayan Shah unified the fifty-four small kingdoms that formerly ruled the area, including Kathmandu valley. A plethora of Nepalese people migrated to Darjeeling, Bhutan, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Thailand, and on to Burma (now Myanmar) (Gellner 2013). This dispersion continued in the 1950s to Indian cities such as Delhi and Mumbai for unskilled labour; in the 1960s to Southeast Asian countries for trade; and in the 1980s and 1990s to Gulf countries, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Korea. Many others migrated to Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and North America (Gellner 2013; Graner and Gurung 2003).

Better living conditions, more affordable medical care, a safer environment, and a strong education system have made Canada a favourable target destination for skilled Nepalese immigrants (Giri 2021, 2022a, 2022b). When Canada eliminated racial criteria in 1962 and shifted to a language-, education-, and occupation-based "point system" (Wayland 1997), a large fragment of Nepalese immigrants started to come to Canada. This process of immigration still continues, and the Nepalese diaspora appears to be one of the emerging and fastest-growing South Asian diasporas in Canada. The history of the Nepalese diaspora can be understood in three pivotal periods: (1) the 1911–1980 period of Nepalese immigration, (2) the 1981–2010 period of Nepalese immigration, and (3) the 2010 onwards period of Nepalese immigration.

3.1. Early Nepalese Immigration, 1911–1980

The earliest immigration of South Asians to Canada can be traced to the early twentieth century (Coward 2000; Hawkins 1991; Johnston 1984). The South Asian diasporic population in Canada was mentioned for the first time in the 1911 census. However, due to obscurity and inconsistency in the census data in terms of classification until the 1991 Canadian census, it is hard to discern what exact part or South Asian country those migrants came from (Ashutosh 2008), and thus the entire South Asian diaspora was constantly referred to as "Hindus" by the Canadian public during that period (Coward 2000), and the immigrants from the South Asian nations were collectively identified as "Hindu" in the 1911 census. This continued in the 1921, 1931, and 1941 censuses. In the 1951, 1961, and 1971 censuses, the South Asian population was referred to as "East Indian". Further, the

1981 census mentioned the South Asian population as "Indo-Pakistani". In all the censuses from 1911 to 1981 (Table 1), there is no official mention of any specific South Asian country.

Table 1. South Asian population, percentage of total Canadian population, and terms used to identify South Asian immigrants from censuses 1911 to 1981.

Census Year	Total South Asian Immigrant Population	% of Total Canadian Population	Term Referred to Identify South Asian Immigrants
1911	2342	0.03	Hindu
1921	1016	0.01	Hindu
1931	1400	0.01	Hindu
1941	1465	0.01	Hindu
1951	2148	0.01	East Indian
1961	6774	0.03	East Indian
1971	67,925	0.03	East Indian
1981	196,390	0.08	Indo-Pakistani

Source: Statistics Canada. Censuses of Canada, 1911–1981.

Later, the 2016 Census "Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables" summarizes the total immigration population of South Asian countries who immigrated before 1981. The census reports a total number of 45 Nepalese immigrants admitted before 1981 (Statistics Canada 2016). There are no additional details on how this number was determined and it is still unclear what specific periods before 1981 these immigrants were admitted to Canada. This can be a matter of curiosity and perhaps confusion as to why this information was not reported in the 1911 to 1981 censuses and why South Asian immigrants were referred as "Hindus", "East Indian", and "Indo-Pakistani" in those censuses. Based on the data available in the 2016 census, the number of Nepalese immigrants in Canada before 1981 seems very small. This early Nepalese Immigration period can be defined as the span of time between 1911 and 1980.

3.2. The First Wave of Nepalese Immigration, 1981–2010

There is some clarity in the 1991 census where the South Asian population was referred to as having "South Asian Origins" and, along with the total South Asian population, each country/state/region or origin (Bengali, Punjabi, Singhalese, Tamil, Bangladeshi, East Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan) was reported in that census. The 1991 census mentions that 100 members of the Nepalese diaspora immigrated during the period of 1981 to 1991. This number is six times higher during the period between 1991 and 2000, with 615 members of the Nepalese diaspora reported in the 2001 census. In the same manner, the 2006 census reports a total of 1925 and the 2011 census reports a total of 4210 members of the Nepalese diaspora who immigrated between 2006 and 2010 (Table 2). Although there was not a massive influx of Nepalese immigrants to Canada between 1990 and 2010, the total numbers reported in each census from 1991 to 2010 demonstrated a sharp increase in the growth of the Nepalese diaspora. This period between 1981 and 2010 can be described as the first wave of Nepalese immigration.

Table 2. Total population of Nepalese immigrants during the period between 1981 and 2010.

Period of Immigration	Total Population
1981 to 1990	100
1991 to 2000	615
2001 to 2005	1925
2006 to 2010	4210

Source: Statistic Canada. Census 2016, Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables.

3.3. The Second Wave of Nepalese Immigration, 2011 Onwards

Comparatively, the period between 2011 and 2021 became a pivotal period in Nepalese immigration to Canada (Table 3). A significant number, a total of 15,080 Nepalese nationals, immigrated to Canada during this period. This immigration period from 2011 onwards can be categorized as the second wave of Nepalese Immigration to Canada.

Table 3. Total population of Nepalese immigrants during the period between 2011 and 2021.

Period of Immigration	Total Population
2011 to 2016	7500
2017 to 2021	7580

Source: Statistic Canada. Census 2016, Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables and Census 2021.

4. An Overview of the Nepalese Diaspora Community

The above section laid out the historical background of the Nepalese diaspora along with their key immigration phases to Canada. What is the current situation of the Nepalese diaspora community in Canada? What is the actual size of this community? What parts of Canada have they settled in particularly? What is their demographic status? These following sub-sections shed light on these questions, focusing on population size, demographic compositions, and geographic concentration.

4.1. The Size of the Nepalese Diasporic Community

According to the 2021 Census "Ethnocultural and Religious Diversity" data, there was a total of 21,975 (11,215 men and 10,510 women) Nepalese immigrants in Canada. These census data are already three years old. Based on the previous rate of Nepalese immigration and the record-high population surge due to the admittance of permanent residents, temporary workers, and international students in the past decade, a significant increase can be anticipated at the current time. Also, this population size does not include the Bhutanese community of Nepalese origin. So, there is a potential for notable change in this population size.

4.2. Geographic Concentration

Table 4 below displays the distribution of the Nepalese immigrants in various provinces across Canada. Based on these data, Ontario appears to be a more favourable province for Nepalese immigrants to settle in, with a total population of 11,585 people. Due to a large community presence and the availability of potential community support and resources for newcomers, it has also become a common destination for most first-time Nepalese immigrants to start their Canadian journey in. After residing in Ontario for a few years, many move to other provinces, depending on the job market and individual and family needs. Alberta is second and British Columbia is third as the most popular destinations for Nepalese immigrants, with 5140 and 2305 population sizes, respectively. The Nepalese diaspora has also scattered to other provinces such as Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories. However, these provinces seem less attractive to Nepalese immigrants. The lower community presence, linguistic difficulties, fewer job opportunities, weather unsuitability, and less accessibility to the main cities can be some chief reasons for the reduced temptation to settle in those provinces. There is no presence of Nepalese immigrants in the Yukon and Nunavut provinces.

Table 4. Total number of Nepalese immigrants, including men and women populations, residing in Canadian provinces and territories.

Province of Territory	Total Population	Men	Women
Ontario	11,585	5890	5690
Alberta	5140	2655	2485
British Columbia	2305	1130	1170
Quebec	980	505	475
Saskatchewan	775	400	370
Manitoba	625	335	285
Nova Scotia	230	115	120
New Brunswick	155	80	75
Prince Edward Island	130	70	60
Newfoundland and Labrador	35	20	20
Northwest Territories	15	-	-
Yukon	-	-	-
Nunavut	-	-	-

Source: Statistics Canada. Census 2021, Ethnic or Cultural Origin Data.

5. Diasporic Experiences

Every diasporic community is a new social formation. Undergoing various phases of relocation, settlement, adaptation, assimilation, and accommodation in a new socio-cultural milieu and living on the margin between native and host cultures, every diasporic community holds unique experiences and stories (Giri 2021, 2024). These stories and experiences play a vital role in understanding the position of any specific diasporic community. Currently, due to a lack of empirical research, it is arduous to find information about the Nepalese diasporic community in Canada. This section delineates some of the key diasporic experiences shared by Nepalese diasporic community members as they embark on a new life in Canada. The interviews from the community members generated a large amount of data. Due to space constraints, this section condenses these stories and experiences into the following three brief sub-sections.

5.1. Moving to Canada

Most of the Nepalese immigrants are landed immigrants in Canada who arranged their Permanent Residency (PR) through the Federal Skilled Worker (FSW) Programme in Canada from their native country. Some have arrived as students and some as temporary foreign workers. No matter what route these Nepalese diasporic community members have chosen to come to Canada through, the majority of them share positive reasons for moving to Canada. For the question "was there any reason to move to Canada?" many community members' responses were identical. They all were driven by the quest for a better quality of and stable life and their children's good education and better future. Interestingly, most of the interviewees knew each other prior to coming to Canada and are from the western region of Nepal. Some were colleagues at the same workplace in Nepal, some are friends of one another, and some are relatives of one another. Most of them immigrated to Canada after listening to their friends', colleagues', and relatives' positive experiences of moving to and settling in Canada. For example, Alok's family heard from his relative about Canada. He was lured by the image of Canada as a developed country and its offers of a better quality of life, and so he quit his teaching job and moved to Canada. He said:

> We heard that Canada is a developed country and they have a guarantee of life, education, and all those things. So, we just planned to move here for [overall] betterment and a good quality of life. (Alok, male, community representative, interview, 17 October 2021)

In a similar manner, Ajay, who was a college lecturer and had a decent living in his native country, heard about Canada and its immigration programme from his friend. He was more concerned about his and his children's social security, which prompted him to move to Canada permanently. He commented:

> Basically, the quality of life between North American countries and Asian countries is different. I was thinking about a more secure and better quality of life for my kids and myself. That's why I moved to Canada. (Ajay, male, community member, interview, 13 November 2021)

Basant, who was auditor in his native country, also shared a similar perspective:

> I believe, everyone tries to have a better life, better environment, and [better] facilities for the children and for oneself. So, my reason for immigrating was something similar to others. (Basant, male, community member, interview, 30 November 2021)

A better lifestyle, education, and health system have certainly enticed the Nepalese diasporic community into leaving their native land and moving to Canada. The political turmoil or instability of Nepal has also greatly contributed to this shift in a large number of Nepalese immigrating to Canada. Some interviewees highlighted this issue. For example, Kaushal, who was a sales manager in a construction company, was demotivated by the political issues and disturbance in his native country to seek a better place for his children. He said:

> Actually, in my homeland there is a political issue, political disturbance. I came here for the better education for my kids and [our] health. I heard Canada is good for them. (Kaushal, community member, interview, 9 November 2021)

Mahesh was also driven by the quest of giving his children a bright future. He found life strenuous in his native country due to political reasons and the unstable government. Despite having good education and a decent job as a college lecturer, he discovered it was difficult for him and his family to survive. He commented:

> We left [Nepal] because there was a political war, or it was not the established government [who was in charge], and even though we were educated, we could not survive on our own. It was a difficult time, so we decided to move because we were looking for a bright future for our children. (Mahesh, male, community representative, interview, 10 December 2021)

In the case of Gaurav, he initially fled to Australia for his studies in 2008 due to civil war and political turmoil in his native country. After the completion of his studies, he chose not to go back to his country of birth but rather moved to Canada permanently. He remarked:

> It was tough in Nepal because Nepal was in a bit of turmoil at that time. There was a Maoist insurgency and there was political instability. The youth were fleeing from the country. So, I decided to go to Australia for my further study back in 2008. I stayed in Australia for about four years and then all my friends were coming to Canada as landed immigrants, and I applied for the same [programme]. (Gaurav, male, community member, interview, 17 January 2022)

The movement of people has been natural since the start of human history. There are multiple reasons for this movement, including work or economic opportunity, family reunion, higher education, social insecurity, difficult lives, demographic pressure, conflict, violence, and natural catastrophes. The European Parliament outlines three push (reasons people leave a country) and pull (reasons people move to a particular country) factors

for immigration: social and political factors; demographic and economic causes; and environmental and climate migration (European Parliament 2020). In the last decade, a record number of global migrations have occurred. The United Nations (2024) notes, "more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born [today]" (para 2). Its population division estimates 281 million people (3.5% of the global population) are international migrants (United Nations 2024). The majority of the Nepalese diaspora appears to immigrate to Canada primarily for socio-political and economic reasons. As indicated by the interviewees, almost everyone was uncertain about their and their children's futures with reference to social security, health, education, and a better quality of life. The political turmoil of the country also played a substantial role in forcing them to leave their native country and seek a better place.

5.2. After Arrival in Canada

The majority of the Nepalese diaspora come to Canada with big dreams and high expectations. Their perspectives and imaginations take a different turn after they arrive and spend a few years or a decade in Canada. One chief issue that the majority of the interviewees stated, which will be discussed here, is a dramatic career shift in their lives. Typically, the Nepalese nationals who come as landed immigrants to Canada are highly qualified and possess a good social and economic status in their native country. They normally have high ranked and high paid governmental or private-sector jobs. Many of them own businesses. However, they end up with unskilled and unprofessional jobs unrelated to their backgrounds as their credentials and professional experiences are devalued and not recognized in Canada.

The following are excerpts from the interviews that reflect this issue. In the case of Piyush, he used to own a college and was Vice Principal. He heard that Canada was a better country with respect to jobs and social security from one of his friends who immigrated in 2013. This encouraged him, so he decided to move to Canada and arrived in 2014. His experience was not pleasant for the first few years after his arrival as he did not get the job that he expected. He worked in motels doing renovations. He remarked:

> Back home, I was Vice Principal of my college. In the beginning, just after immigration, it was very hard. When I came to Canada, I started working in a motel. I started doing renovations in motels. There was a big gap in my professions. (Piyush, male, community member, interview, 15 December 2019)

By the same token, Tirtha experienced a profession shift in his career after immigrating to Canada. He was a journalist in his native country for decades, but it was not possible for him to practice his profession in Canada. Rather, he ended up with a survival job that forced him to do excessive physical work. He remarked:

> I used to do a decent job in my interested profession [journalism] in Nepal. When I came here, there was a profession shift, like a paradigm shift in my life. I had my identity in Nepal, but here it's like a drop of water in an ocean. Finding a job in my own profession was the hardest part, which I never got. I had to take an unskilled job for survival that demanded excessive physical work. (Tirtha, male, community member, interview, 5 January 2020)

In a similar manner, there are multiple other elements that also contribute to changing pre-immigration imagery and aspirations of members of the Nepalese diaspora about Canada after arrival. For example, many interviewees shared their experiences of encountering race-based stereotypes in public spaces and the workplace. The interviewees also expressed their concerns about the homogenization of their cultural identity under neighbouring South Asian populations like Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, and specifically

Indian populations. They fear losing their identity due to overgeneralization based on culture, language, and heritage and feel discomfort due to race-based stereotypes. Further, due to their small size and their recency of arrival in Canada, the Nepalese diasporic community is a very young community struggling for its settlement and establishment. Some shared their feelings of underrepresentation and marginalization due to the lack of access, participation, and representation in politics, policy-making, or any decision-making level.

Another critical issue reported by most of the interviewees was the culture and weather shock they experienced after immigrating to Canada. Many members of the Nepalese diaspora find this depressing, a big challenge, tough to adjust to in Canada, and the cause of negative psychological developments. According to Rahul, it was very hard for him and his family to adjust to a new culture in Canada after immigrating. He commented:

> When we came here, the biggest struggle was to embrace the new culture in Canada. We came from a totally different culture, and we really had a hard time. We were exposed to a new culture and how they celebrate Christmas, what is Thanksgiving, what are all those different things; to understand the culture and society was tough. (Rahul, male, community member, interview, 15 December 2019)

Comparatively, Nepal has warmer weather than Canada. Specifically, the people who moved to Canada from Nepal (western region) enjoy warm temperatures throughout the year. Coping with the cold Canadian weather—particularly in the winter when the temperature goes below between −30 and −40 degrees Celsius—is a tough challenge for Nepalese immigrants. Naresh shared his experience dealing with weather shocks:

> I think the initial two years were very hard—not knowing anyone here, and not having all these experiences to cope with cold weather. A lot of shocks in terms of weather, in terms of culture, in terms of social network. So, the initial two years were very hard. After that, I managed to build my network, and we kind of adjusted to the weather. (Naresh, male, community representative, interview, 20 December 2019)

These cultural and weather shocks have created, and continue to exacerbate, several mental health-related problems among Nepalese diasporas in Canada. Himal described how the community is developing long-term negative psychological and emotional issues due to these shocks:

> The first-generation immigrants from our community are facing more challenges. Before coming to Canada, they hear what the Canadian culture is like, but they haven't experienced it. When they arrive here, they find it completely different. While transiting from one culture to another, they undergo a big cultural shock. Due to isolation and a lack of cultural activities, the immigrants from our community eventually develop long-term negative psychological and emotional issues. (Himal, male, community representative, interview, 3 January 2020)

Diasporic life is full of fluidity, ambiguities, and uncertainties (Giri 2021). As this section reveals, there seems to be a stark shift from the pre-immigration perspective and imagery to the post-immigration perspective and imagery among Nepalese immigrants. The range of post-immigration issues of career shifts, race-based stereotypes, cultural shock, weather shock, and the like have added a whole new epoch in their initial phase of diasporic life.

5.3. Longing for Homeland

Kim D. Butler (2001) remarks that homeland ties are a "hallmark of diasporan identity" (p. 204). In the same vein, William Safran (1991) outlines characteristics of a diaspora in

six different points, locating homeland as a key element. Robin Cohen (2008) finds these homeland ties common in diasporas and says, "a homeland is imbued with an expressive charge and a sentimental pathos that seem to be almost universal" (p. 103). Indeed, in the process of forming a new identity and the state of feeling the pain of separation, the notion of homeland is very vivid in the diaspora (Giri 2024).

In the case of the Nepalese diaspora, missing their homeland is the hardest part of their life. Specifically, at the early phase of struggling to adjust, the absence of festivals, cultural events, or religious activities, parents, relatives, and friends, and the desire to be with them and return to the homeland remain a central part of Nepalese diasporic life. This longing for the homeland, culture, and heritage was reflected vividly during the interviews. For example, Anchal—who immigrated to Canada in 2011—yearns for her separated siblings as well as celebrations and festivals. She shared her feelings:

> I come from a big family, and my eight siblings are still in Nepal. I miss them very much. I miss Nepalese celebrations and festivals. However, we try to follow the rituals and show our kids how we celebrate. (Anchal, female, community member, interview, 10 November 2021)

For Divyesh, the diasporic life in Canada is very busy. He immigrated in 2010 and has two children. It is hard for him to find enough time to spend with his children. He wants his children to spend time with their grandparents and learn their language and culture. He thinks this family support and bonding is missing in his life. When special festivals and cultural activities occur in his native land, he finds it difficult to deal with this longing. He commented:

> Almost every day [I miss my homeland]. When we have special festivals or important cultural or religious activities that take place back home, I missed those events a lot because other than me, everybody's there, you know. And I feel like if I was there, I could contribute a little bit. I could participate and I could make it count there, physically. (Divyesh, male, community representative, interview, 13 January 2022)

Although they cannot physically experience the actual religio- and socio-cultural celebrations, meet friends and relatives, and be spatially present, the Nepalese diaspora maintains their homeland ties by attending large festivals, community-based gatherings, and temple congregations held in their locality (Giri 2021, 2024). Some are involved in community organizations, holding specific volunteer positions to connect with fellow community members. Most members of the Nepalese diaspora enrol their children in community language schools to teach their children their native language, expose their children to their native culture, and expect their children to develop friendships with other Nepalese diaspora parent-born children. Many use social networks—mainly Facebook Messenger, Skype, and Viber, for example—to connect with families, friends, and relatives in Nepal. In a developing phenomenon, some have also started returning to Nepal in their sixties after their children are independent and settled in Canada.

6. Contemporary Issues

After the first few years or a decade of struggle, most of the Nepalese immigrants find themselves in a more favourable position in the process of settlement in Canada. Buying a home for the family is the first priority of settlement among the majority of the Nepalese diaspora. Upgrading studies, searching for secure jobs, and arranging their children's education are other key priorities that happen simultaneously during the process of settlement. As members of the Nepalese diaspora settle or move further down the path of settlement in Canada and their children grow, they also face many challenges. Among

these challenges, the chief two that the majority of the interviewees indicated, and that are receiving growing attention from this diasporic community, are discussed below.

6.1. Cultural Continuation

Declining cultural practice has been a global issue in recent decades. There are a range of factors that are affecting people's traditional arts, embedded languages, cultural practises, and individual and collective identities and migration is one of them (Giri 2022a, 2022b; Giri and Grant Forthcoming; Grant 2014). Cultural assimilation with the host society is apparent in any diasporic community after immigration. However, every community still aims to maintain their native heritage in the hostland. To some extent, despite the exposure of a new culture, new environment, and new society, they are successful until the first generation arrives. As a diasporic community shifts to the next generation, the cultural practice of the native land gradually declines, and it possesses a greater chance of disappearing in subsequent generations. This issue of declining cultural practice has received much focus among the Nepalese diaspora, as evident in the interviews. One of the interviewees, Sarthak expressed his concern:

> Culturally, uprooting is a major issue for people after immigration from their home country. The kids are very vulnerable and they get adapted to the new environment very quickly, and the chances that they can easily, you know, forget their own identity. (Sarthak, male, community member, interview, 9 November 2021)

Diasporic life is full of post-immigration challenges. In the "Diasporic Experience" section, I have discussed a range of challenges encountered by the Nepalese diaspora after arriving in Canada. Some of them are settlement related strains, for example, overtime jobs, housing, mortgage, financial concerns, and the like. Many of the first-generation immigrants are not able to spend enough time with their children to teach their native culture due to their settlement-related strains. This risks them losing their culture and heritage. Alok shared a similar concern:

> This [cultural continuation] is a complex thing for immigrant people. . . .We don't have that much time to do some cultural activities because of demanding jobs and also because of the financial situation of people. . . .I am really worried about the coming generation because I feel like they will miss language knowledge. Language is our heritage. If we forget our language, we will forget our culture, we will forget our festivals, and we will forget our music. I see that as one of the biggest issues in our community. (Alok, male, community representative, interview, 17 October 2021)

The size of the Nepalese diasporic community in Canada is very small. Based on the Canada Census 2021, it comprises an extremely small percentage (1%) of the 68.64% South Asian immigration population within the total Canadian immigration population (Statistics Canada 2023). The community is striving for its existence and establishment (Giri 2023). The lack of cultural resources, such as space, infrastructure, and cultural means (cultural objects, artefacts, and archives) is obvious in this community, which to some extent, has an impact on their ability to practise their cultural heritage. Also, the lack of adequate cultural programmes and experts available for transferring knowledge to youth and children is common to this community. Utsav, a community representative highlighted the following issue:

> There is a huge gap in the community regarding cultural transmission. . .. We don't have resources, such as community people who can train the newer generation. We don't have physical resources and we cannot afford them, and they are not available here. There are very limited cultural training, workshops, teaching,

> and classes in the community, and those which are available have long waiting list. (Utsav, male, community representative, interview, 2 December 2019)

Overall, the decline in the practice of native culture and heritage has caused significant concern among the Nepalese diaspora community and has raised fears for future disappearance. Lack of time due to settlement-related strains and lack of physical resources and cultural training/activities are playing a major role in contributing to this issue.

6.2. Intergenerational Gap

A growing intergenerational gap has been another challenging issue for the Nepalese diaspora. The first-generation parents are mostly raised and have spent half of their life in Nepal. The second-generation children and youth are mostly born and raised in a Western cultural setting. This contrast is one key contributing factor in developing this intergenerational gap. For example, Chirag, a youth from the community feels disconnected from the older generation. He feels that the youth are not represented in the community. He remarked:

> I think the generational gap is real. I don't want to blame the adult people completely for not involving youth. We don't feel connected with them. Even when they involve us, we hesitate to join them. It's not that we don't like it, but I feel like they are not representing what we want them to represent about youth. (Chirag, male, youth, interview, 20 January 2020)

Similarly, Pratik, another youth from the Nepalese diaspora community feels that children and youth are less focused and less engaged in cultural celebrations. According to him, the lack of children and youth involvement in any adult activities is aiding the gap between the first and second generation. He said:

> In our tradition, kids are usually the last thought, so to speak, because mom and dad are busy preparing food and meals because they are going to host guests and so forth. For us, I think, children are less of a focus. If you want these traditions to continue with the youth, you need to make children a greater focus. In general, I feel that, in Nepalese culture, including kids is a little bit lacklustre. (Pratik, male, youth, interview, 1 February 2020)

As I discussed in the "After Arrival in Canada" and "Cultural Continuation" sections, the first-generation Nepalese undergo a range of issues and difficulties during the early years and decades of their immigration. This includes career-, job-, housing-, and finance-related struggles. They put all of their time and effort into improving these situations and issues. As a result, they are unable to spend sufficient time with their children. Isha, a youth from the community points out this issue as one of the reasons for the creation of a generational gap. She said:

> I think many Nepalese parents, especially in Canada, are not giving enough time to their children, so that the children can't communicate. That's the biggest issue. The parents are newly immigrated, and they need to struggle and accomplish their financial needs to make their children happy, in a way. That's creating a gap. (Isha, female, youth, interview, 12 January 2020)

The older generation community members do agree with this issue of a growing intergenerational gap. They see, from the older generation parents' side, an insufficient ability to approach, engage, and appreciate the youth in cultural activities, which is increasing the youths' detachment from the community. Providing an example of her own daughters, Sanjana highlighted the following issue:

> What I see as one of the gaps or challenges is that we haven't been able to involve our youth a lot. I am talking about my older girls; they were involved in a language school a lot when they were young. Now, they are not going much; only here and there they volunteer, but they are not actively participating in our community, except attending some parties and festivals. They should be appreciated, they should be engaged, they should be approached. Right now, I don't think we have been approaching them. If we don't involve them in the beginning, they don't know what to do. They don't have any attachment to the community. (Sanjana, community representative, interview, 11 January 2020)

As I pointed out earlier, the contrast between the two generations born and raised in two different cultural and societal settings has also played a crucial role in creating the gap. Naresh, a community representative, admits the impact of mainstream Canadian culture on Nepalese children and the failure of parents to spend enough time teaching Nepalese culture are also contributing factors for such a gap. He states:

> What I see, like, living in Canada and living in Edmonton, the time they [children] spend is in mainstream society, that is, English society and the Canadian cultural society. Most of the time they interact with people from different cultures, but they speak English with friends, teachers. So, that English makes their personality or makes their way of thinking, and they get motivated or guided by the English environment. (Naresh, male, community representative, interview, 20 December 2019)

In general, the lack of the involvement of children and youth in house and community activities, the lack of time spent communicating with children and youth, and the exposure to and influence of Western culture are some of the chief issues in developing this gap. Both the first and second generation are aware of intergenerational gaps in the community. However, this has specifically been putting more pressure on and instilling fear in the first-generation members of the Nepalese diaspora.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined the Nepalese diaspora of Canada, tracing their history by breaking it down into three different phases of immigration. The findings suggest that the Nepalese diaspora started immigrating to Canada along with the nationals of other South Asian countries during the first decade of the twentieth century. Due to tougher immigration policies, no Nepalese (or general Asian) immigration movement was observed until the late 1960s. After the first mention of Nepalese immigration in the 1991 census of Canada, it experienced a swift rise, with Nepalese immigration increasing three-fold in each subsequent census until the 2010s. This immigration pattern further accelerated in the early years of the 2010s and has been continuously trending upward, indicating the Nepalese diasporic community is an emerging and fast-growing South Asian community in Canada. This study also demonstrated the geographic concentrations and settlement patterns of the Nepalese diaspora, highlighting the three provinces—Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia—that the Nepalese diasporic community prefers most for settlement.

Based on diasporic experiences shared by the diasporic community members and their representatives, this study uncovered a range of details on the reasons behind immigrating to and life after arrival in Canada. For example, the findings suggest a large number of Nepalese immigrants are impelled to immigrate to Canada in the quest of a better life, health care, social security, their children's education, and to escape political turmoil and instability in their native country. This study shed light on the numerous issues such as

stressors from career shifts, cultural shocks, weather shocks, daily life struggles, race-based stereotypes, and the experience of homogenization encountered by the Nepalese diasporas.

The findings of this study on the issues faced and expressed by the Nepalese diaspora appear to support the results in the literature on devaluation of credentials, racial discrimination, settlement/adaptation-related strains, and mental health-related problems among the immigrant communities in Canada. In fact, these are common issues and challenges found in other immigrant communities in Canada and widely discussed in the immigration literature (Giri Forthcoming). First, on the issue of the devaluation of credentials, a case study conducted by Aycan and Berry (1996) in a Montreal-based Turkish immigrant community who immigrated as skilled workers (permanent residents) highlights the issue regarding the transferability of Turkish immigrant credentials and accreditations they obtained in Turkey. Aycan and Berry's study finds that despite being qualified and well-educated, their credentials were not recognized in Canada and they had difficulty integrating into the Canadian labour force. In another study carried out by Barsan and Li (1998) in Vancouver, British Columbia, Chinese immigrants—who were doctors, engineers, school/university teachers, and other professionals—were unable to access professional occupations due to the nonrecognition of their foreign credentials and training. Similarly to the finding of this study, these highly qualified Chinese professionals had to change their original occupation and move to a lower social status by taking nonprofessional jobs. Naidoo (1992), in her research, shares immigrants' bitter experiences of trying to access professions in Canada, demonstrating the pain of one Vietnamese immigrant doctor who attempted to enter the medical profession for over a period of nine years and was forced to do dishwashing, newspaper delivery, and interpreting for the police during that time. Esses et al. (2006) remark that the negative attitude toward immigrants, cultural differences, and location of birth or training are the key factors in this devaluation and discounting of skills.

Second, on the issue of racial discrimination among immigrants in Canada, several studies (e.g., Canadian Human Rights Commission 2023; Triadafilopoulos 2013; Mooten 2021) agree that racial discrimination does exist in Canada although Canada is celebrated as a diverse, multicultural, and inclusive country. To provide a historical context to this issue, historically, Canada has not been a country favourable towards immigrants. Hawkins (1991) points out the restrictions placed on Asian immigrants in immigration policy from the 1880s onwards and the disenfranchisement of Asian immigrants for fifty-two years (1895–1947) in Canada. Similarly, Wayland (1997) refers to the rise in anti-immigrant sentiments and racist violence in immigrant neighbourhoods in 1907 in Vancouver, the increase in anti-Asian xenophobia during the economic depression of the 1930s, and restrictions preventing Asian immigrants from entering certain professions in British Columbia. The issue of racial discrimination still exists in the present-day. Based on the survey from 2021 to 2024, Statistics Canada states, "just over half (51%) of racialized people aged 15 years and older reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment within the five years prior to the survey" (Statistics Canada 2024, p. 1).

Third, on the issues of adaptation/settlement-produced strains and mental health—driven by these strains of downward mobility, economic hardships, racial stereotypes, cultural shock, and weather shocks experienced by the Nepalese diaspora community—multiple studies underline such challenges. For example, in a study carried out by Noh and Avison (1996), a Korean immigrant community living in Toronto, Ontario, predominantly experienced issues of isolation, homesickness/nostalgia, financial hardship, issues adapting to a new language, identity change, and cultural change that negatively impacted their mental health. George et al. (2015) identify economic hardship, family adaptation challenges, and feeling the loss of the homeland as major factors in affecting

the mental well-being of Sudanese immigrants residing in Ontario and Alberta, Canada. A study conducted by Islam et al. (2014) on South Asian immigrants finds higher rates of anxiety disorders and extremely arduous life stress among first-generation immigrants compared to their Canadian-born counterparts.

This study also underscored the powerful expression of belongingness and deep attachment to the ethnic roots and longing of the homeland, including families, friends, relatives, childhood memories, festivals, and religio-cultural practises among the Nepalese diaspora. This finding appears to be consistent with the literature in diaspora studies. In Brubaker's (2005) and Butler's (2001) work, they emphasize that the orientation and bonding to homeland are key constituents of a diaspora as the homeland has a special place among diasporas. Similarly, Tölölyan (2007) highlights the function of homeland ties and says, "they [diaspora] turn again and again towards the homeland through travel, remittances, cultural exchange, and political lobbying and by various contingent efforts to maintain other links with the homeland (p. 649)". In my previous work (2024), I have defined these homeland ties as "'homeland echoes'—seeking homeland by recreating or resembling or reaffirming the cultural production and religio-cultural practice of homeland" (p. 11).

Apart from diasporic experience, this study unearthed the contemporary issues emerging in the Nepalese diasporic community outlined in two key themes of cultural continuity and intergenerational gaps. These findings of cultural decline and growing intergenerational gaps among the first and second generations identified in this study is apparent in the diasporic literature as "hybridity", "redefined identity", or "new social formation". In Khachig Tölölyan's (2007) work, he argues that elements such as the homeland's language, or religious, social, and cultural practises in a diaspora may not remain intact. According to Tölölyan, these elements "as time passes, [change] in mixed, bicultural forms; the best-known subset of biculturalism is denoted by the term *hybridity*" (p. 649). Existing in a fluid state and surrounded by a certain environment in their day-to-day lives, a diaspora cannot refrain from being influenced by their new socio-cultural milieu. Some scholars have also discussed such hybridity as transformed or redefined identity. For example, Turino and Lea (2004) suggest that a diaspora often encounters the issue of hybridity or redefined identity in the process of a new social formation. I have argued somewhere else that this new social formation occurs as a diaspora continues to make significant adjustments to and accommodations for their religo-cultural practises over the time of their settlement, driven by the factors of time, resources, and environment (Giri 2024).

The findings of this study will have important implications for informing the incoming and prospective Nepalese immigrants (and perhaps any immigrants in general) about various post-immigration challenges in Canada. The findings suggest that there is downward occupational mobility, including several other adaptation-associated problems in post-immigration life in Canada. These findings will educate and assist in preparing new immigrants coming to Canada. It may also be helpful to government agencies and service organizations in developing effective settlement programmes and policies in relation to newly immigrated permanent residents. The findings also intimate the decline in cultural practises and the increase in intergenerational gaps in the Nepalese diaspora community. These findings may assist the Nepalese diaspora in developing culture- and youth-centred programmes aiming to maintain cultural continuity and filling the intergenerational gap.

As the first empirical research of its kind, this study contributed valuable knowledge to the literature about the situation of the Nepalese diaspora in Canada. The first-hand data presented in this study, based on in-depth interviews, offered invaluable insights into the present position of the Nepalese diasporic community. There is an abundance of research potentials to explore with this community. This study is a first attempt towards its scholarship. Due to limited space, this study did not get an opportunity to rigorously

look into every issue this community faces. Some potential areas of inquiry would be the undocumented population, the socio-economic profile, gender issues, mental well-being-related issues, and other settlement-related issues and challenges. This would further contribute to a greater understanding of this community. Also, it would be worthwhile to compare and contrast the Nepalese Canadian diaspora to other Nepalese diasporas living across the world, particularly in the United States.

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