

Belonging Beyond Borders: Nepalese Migration and Diasporic Life in Canada

Nigel Arian*

Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Introduction

The migration of Nepalese individuals and families to Canada represents a complex and evolving narrative that reflects broader patterns of global mobility, diasporic identity, and transnational belonging. Over the past few decades, the Nepalese diaspora in Canada has grown steadily, establishing a visible presence in urban centers and contributing to the country's multicultural fabric. This development is situated within a broader context of South Asian migration, yet it retains distinct historical, cultural, and social features that merit focused examination. The Nepalese experience in Canada encapsulates a journey of adaptation, aspiration, and resilience—one that is deeply shaped by the intersections of homeland memory, diasporic identity, and contemporary social challenges [1].

Description

Nepalese migration to Canada did not occur in significant numbers until the late 20th century. Before the 1990s, the Nepalese population in Canada was minimal, consisting primarily of students, international scholars, and a few professionals drawn by academic or diplomatic opportunities. The 1990s marked a turning point, as political instability in Nepal, including the decade-long Maoist conflict, led to increased outmigration. The search for safety, stability, and opportunity prompted many Nepalese to explore immigration options in countries with favorable policies, and Canada emerged as a desirable destination due to its inclusive immigration system, social services, and reputation for multiculturalism. Most Nepalese immigrants arrived in Canada through skilled worker programs, family sponsorship, or as international students. The Canadian points-based immigration system appealed to well-educated Nepalese professionals, many of whom had acquired degrees in science, engineering, or healthcare. At the same time, Canada's expanding need for skilled labor and its international education market further opened doors to Nepalese applicants. International students from Nepal have increasingly used their academic pathway as a route to permanent residency [2].

populations found in Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec. Cities like Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, and Montreal serve as hubs of Nepalese cultural life and community engagement. In these urban centers, Nepalese immigrants have established organizations, temples, and cultural associations that play an essential role in fostering communal bonds and preserving cultural heritage. These spaces serve not only as sites of social gathering but also as mechanisms for intergenerational transmission of language, traditions, and collective memory. Diasporic life for Nepalese Canadians is characterized by a

***Address for Correspondence:** Nigel Arian, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, E-mail: ariannigel@gmail.com

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negotiation of identity across multiple axes: ethnic, national, linguistic, and generational. The first-generation immigrants often maintain strong connections to Nepal through remittances, travel, and communication, while also striving to adapt to Canadian norms and expectations. This dual belonging creates both opportunities and tensions, as individuals navigate life between two cultural spheres. The sense of responsibility toward family in Nepal, alongside the pursuit of success and integration in Canada [3].

For second-generation Nepalese Canadians—those born or raised in Canada—the experience of diasporic identity is further nuanced. These individuals are often fluent in English or French and are deeply embedded in Canadian social and educational systems. However, they may also grapple with questions of cultural continuity, authenticity, and inclusion. Parents may expect their children to uphold Nepali customs, language, and values, while broader Canadian society offers alternative norms and aspirations. In this context, issues of cultural hybridity and identity negotiation become central to the second-generation experience. Many young Nepalese Canadians find themselves crafting hybrid identities that integrate elements of both cultures, leading to innovative forms of cultural expression through music, art, language, and activism. Language preservation is a particularly important aspect of diasporic life. While Nepali is commonly spoken at home among first-generation immigrants, there is an ongoing concern about language attrition among younger members of the community. In response, community organizations often organize Nepali language classes, cultural festivals, and religious ceremonies aimed at reinforcing cultural identity. These events also serve as intergenerational bridges, fostering a sense of collective belonging that transcends individual experiences [4].

Religion plays a significant role in maintaining cultural cohesion within the Nepalese diaspora. Hinduism and Buddhism, the two predominant religions in Nepal, continue to shape diasporic spiritual life in Canada. Temples and religious associations provide spaces for ritual practice, spiritual education, and community service. Religious festivals such as Dashain, Tihar, and Buddha Jayanti are celebrated with enthusiasm, often drawing large gatherings that reaffirm collective identity and cultural pride. These events also offer a platform for cultural diplomacy and intercultural exchange, as members of other communities are often invited to participate. The economic integration of Nepalese immigrants into Canadian society presents a mixed picture. Many Nepalese Canadians are highly educated and possess strong professional skills, yet they often face systemic barriers in credential recognition, employment opportunities, and career advancement. It is not uncommon for skilled immigrants to accept positions below their qualifications, leading to underemployment and economic frustration. This phenomenon, while not unique to the Nepalese community, highlights the challenges that come with the transition from one national context to another. Nonetheless, over time, many Nepalese Canadians have succeeded in establishing themselves in various fields including healthcare, education, information technology, hospitality, and small business ownership [5].

Conclusion

Nepalese-owned businesses from restaurants and grocery stores to accounting firms and real estate agencies contribute to local economies while serving the needs of the diaspora. These enterprises often function as cultural hubs, where language, food, and tradition intersect with commerce. They also

represent the ingenuity and adaptability of Nepalese immigrants who leverage both their cultural capital and business acumen to navigate the Canadian market. Education is a high priority within the Nepalese community, and parents often place strong emphasis on academic achievement and professional success. This value is reflected in the high levels of educational attainment among Nepalese youth, many of whom pursue careers in science, engineering, medicine, and finance. Community support networks, mentorship programs, and student associations help foster academic and professional growth, while also creating spaces for peer solidarity and cultural affirmation.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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