

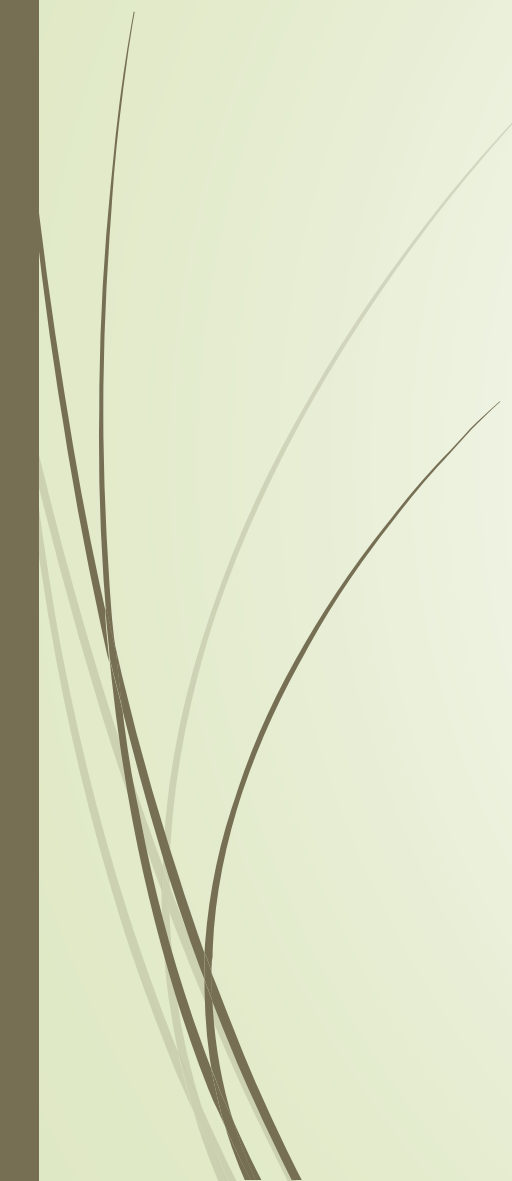


Nepal's Great Transformation?

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Outline

- Defining great transformation
 - Nepal development paradox/the puzzle
 - Key questions and arguments
 - evidence: social transformation
 - Concluding discussion on precarity and paradox
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Framing Nepal's 'great transformation'

- irreversible qualitative 'step-change' in the way politics, economy and society are organised, that is, beyond the continual or 'normal' processes of incremental change (Castles 2001), noting that such transformation is fraught with tensions and paradoxes
 - 'great transformation' in more specific analytical terms, as explained by Karl Polanyi in his book 'The Great Transformation'
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Polanyi's double movement and great transformation

- ▶ First movement: pre-market and pre-industrial system when economic activity was rooted in familial, kinship, religious or political obligations and regulations to *market society (commodification of land, labour and money)*
 - ▶ market servicing the society to society serving the market
- ▶ Second movement: countermovement to the first i.e. the disruptive force of market society that led to poverty, job insecurity, ecological crisis, this was brought under control by regulation, reform and social protection



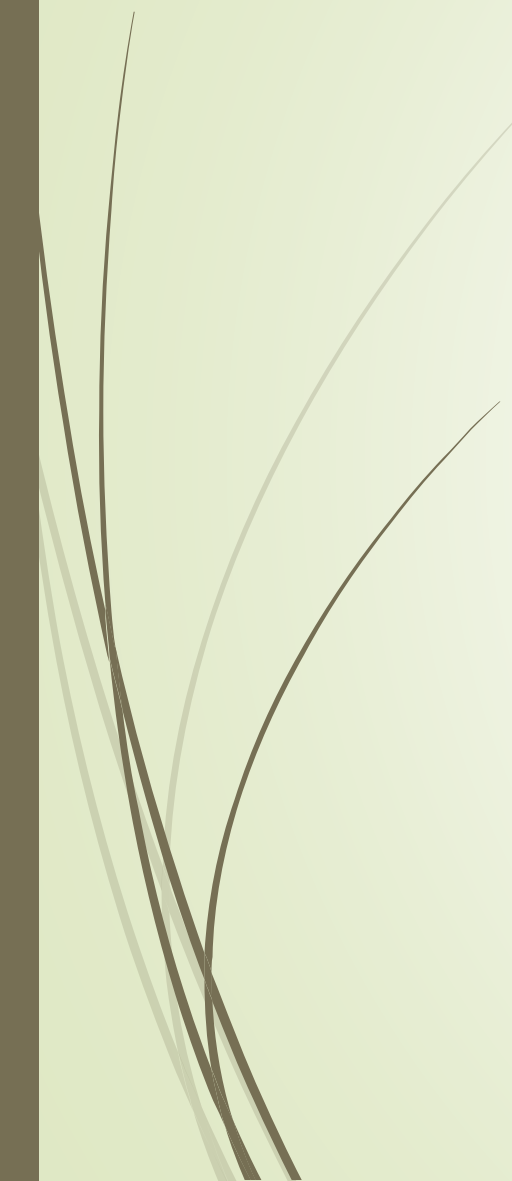
puzzle



- ▶ Nepal has experienced a compressed and tumultuous political, economic and social transformation since the 1950s, more pronounced since 1990
- ▶ Politically: centralized, Hindu and monarchical state into federal, secular and republican state, with ideas of rights, inclusion, and equality
- ▶ Economically: gradual shift in the political economy of rural livelihoods
- ▶ Emergence of out-migration as a key project of 'freedom' although paradoxically, it is met with unfreedom



Making sense of Nepal's compressed social and economic changes

- ▶ What does it mean to talk about change, transformation and transition in Nepal beyond its stereotypical image of fatalism and immobility?
 - ▶ How are powerful historical processes experienced and negotiated in Nepal?
 - ▶ How might we assess the paradoxical effects of these transformations in people's lives and livelihoods, both in terms of expanding ideas of rights and freedom, while also producing vulnerabilities and precarity?
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Arguments

- ▶ Widespread consciousness of historical marginalisation and call for rights and citizenship, together with increased opportunities for labour outmigration and cash, have certainly offered aspirations and ideas of freedom for the historically marginalised and labouring population, away from old forms of precarity rooted in attached labour and feudal logics
- ▶ Yet, the actual experiences of labour outmigration are exposing the migrants and their households to new forms of risks and precarity
- ▶ Despite this, Nepal has not seen a 'countermovement from below' calling for social protection
- ▶ While there have been tectonic shifts in Nepal's politics, society and economy, great transformation in the strict Polanyian sense is unlikely, where the counter movement from below for social protection is not there

From subjects to citizens



Previously if they (people of high caste) wanted to talk to us, they would call us and we went to their place. Now they come to where we are. Earlier, they would say—‘Oh Rame, come here’ and I would simply go (Ye, Rame, yet aaija ta ani ma khuru khuru janthe). Now, they come to me and say—‘Hello Ram brother or Ramji, I wanted to talk to you about something’ (Oho ram bhai or Ram ji, euta sallah garnu parne thiyo). I must say this is a big change, isn’t it.

—A Dalit activist in a hill village in western Nepal

They didn’t like us wearing good clothes. If they saw you wearing good clothes, they would call you and make you carry dusty bricks. They were very bad. All those days are gone now; the old man is dead.

—A Dalit man in a Terai village in western-central Nepal

From subjects to citizens



- Caste and untouchability
- Gender discrimination and women's position
- Shift in local power relations
- Nature and drivers of social change

Peasantry, mobility and the changing face of rural Nepal



- Diversification of rural livelihoods
- Weakening of caste-based feudal relations
- Commodification of labour
- Culture of migration
- Precarities



Mobility and educational and occupational aspirations

- Social meanings and patterns of mobility
- Navigating the city
- Emerging caste and ethnic identities in cities



Development and patronage politics



- *Bikas* as distribution– not only created new citizens but also a system of distributive coalitions that are rooted in clientelism and patronage politics.
- shaped by its history of unequal distribution of land, caste and patronage system.
- Power does not just emanate from landholding and caste-based configurations, but also through access to education, new social, political and economic networks and new sources of rent

Development and patronage politics

- 1950–1960: Nepal's Initial Rush for Development in the New Era
- 1961-1990: Panchayat System—Nation-building through *Bikas*
- 1990-1996: Democratisation for development
- 1996–2005: Conflict and Development
- 2006–2015: Peace Process and State-restructuring
- The 2015 Earthquake, Humanitarian Assistance and the Emergence of a 'New' Nepali Nationalism





Precarity and paradox in once remote locations

- ▶ while transformation in Nepal appears to follow Polanyian structural logic, it does not seem to follow the political logic of double movement put forward by Polanyi
- ▶ characterises of major social and political movements that emerged in Nepal since the 1990s are qualitatively different than Polanyian countermovement calling for social protection
- ▶ social and political movements witnessed in Nepal have called for multiculturalism, recognition and democratisation whose aims have not been to protect society from the whims of the market forces, but to free it from domination that have historically emanated from within society in the form of religion, caste, ethnicity, language and gender
- ▶ outsourcing of demographic dividend in racialised and class divided economies, and the impact on the left behind households