

# SOCIAL SUFFERINGS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE TUSSLE :A NECROPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF NEPALI CITIZENS EXPOSED IN SORDID TRAFFICKING.

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# THE CONTEXT

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- The government of Nepal has **confirmed** that Nepalese nationals have been recruited into the Russian armed forces and have died while fighting in the conflict in Ukraine. For example, in December 2023 they confirmed six Nepalese citizens killed while serving for the Russian side.
- Nepal's government estimates that around **150-200 Nepalese** were serving in the Russian army near the end of 2023.
- Some media reports suggest much higher numbers (unspecified) — for example, up to thousands — though these are not officially confirmed.
- The recruitment reportedly involves Nepalese citizens being lured by promises of high pay, jobs abroad, or immigration benefits, sometimes via agents. Upon arrival in Russia, many have claimed they were directed into military service with little training.
- In response, Nepal suspended issuing labour-work permits for Russia and Ukraine.
- The Nepalese government has formally asked Russia to stop recruiting Nepali nationals, to repatriate those who are serving and the bodies of those killed, and to compensate families.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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- Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) is an analytical approach used to study how language, power, and ideology shape policy-making and policy texts.
- It combines insights from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and policy studies to uncover the hidden assumptions, interests, and social effects embedded in policies.
- Humanitarian forensics is the application of forensic science — such as anthropology, pathology, DNA analysis, and archaeology — to humanitarian purposes, primarily to:
  - Identify deceased individuals,
  - Document human rights violations, and
  - Provide answers to families of missing persons while respecting human dignity and ethics.

# METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK (MULTI-METHOD APPROACH)

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- **Semi-autoethnography** refers to a hybrid qualitative research approach where the researcher combines:
  - Personal reflections or lived experiences (auto),
  - With observations or narratives from others or the field (ethno).
- **Netnography** (short for “Internet ethnography”) is a qualitative research method that studies social interaction, behavior, and culture in online contexts — such as social media platforms, forums, blogs, or virtual communities.

# ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REALITIES

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- Nepal is a country with many young people seeking employment abroad; remittances are a major part of the economy.
- Many of those who end up recruited reportedly come from impoverished or rural backgrounds, with limited job opportunities at home.
- The prospect of a relatively high salary (compared to domestic alternatives) is reported to be a lure for some.
- The estimated unemployment rate in 2022 was 11.1%, according to the World Bank, compared with 10.6% in 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Tens of thousands of Nepalis travel to Gulf countries for work every year, with international remittances amounting to nearly 23% of the country's GDP.

# CLASSICAL PUSH FACTORS

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*“...I didn’t join the Russian military for pleasure. I didn’t have any job opportunities in Nepal. I got fascinated with all those Tiktok videos coming out from Russia. We didn’t realize we would be sent to the frontlines that quickly and how horrible the situation would be. We arrived in Moscow in September last year. After only two weeks of training, he said, he was sent to the front lines in Bakhmut – a town in eastern Ukraine that saw some of the heaviest fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces – with a gun and a basic kit. Most of the houses have been destroyed. The situation there is so gruesome that it makes you want to cry. I still get a headache when I think about the terrible scenes I saw in the war zone...” (IDI) Respondent - I*

# NEPALI (SOLDIERS) IN RUSSIA





# NEPAL'S OFFICIAL POLICY, DIPLOMATIC POSTURE & INTERNAL POLITICAL IMPACT

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- Nepal has publicly asked the Russian government to cease recruitment of Nepali nationals for the war and to return those already serving, as well as the remains of those killed.
- The Nepali government states that no Nepali citizen is permitted to join a foreign army except under established bilateral agreements (which Russia is *not* part of).
- Nepal made it mandatory for any citizen travelling to Russia to obtain a “No Objection Letter” (NOL) from its Consular Services Department.
- Nepal’s law enforcement and immigration authorities have arrested individuals/gangs accused of recruiting Nepalis into Russia’s war effort via irregular routes.
- The issue has become a source of domestic pressure: families of Nepalis missing, injured or killed in the conflict have been appealing to the government for help.
- The problem underscores wider issues of youth unemployment, migration pressures, governance of foreign labor, and Nepal’s vulnerability to external recruitment networks.

# THE CASE OF SORDID TRAFFICKING

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- *“...Lured by a recruitment video I had seen on YouTube, I had thought I was going for a secure security job far from the war in Ukraine. But in strained phone calls home from Russia, I told my family I was instead sent to a month-long military training camp and then taken to the frontlines, where I was made to dig trenches, carry ammunition and operate rifles and machine guns. I had been promised a job in Germany through an agent I met on social media, and was told I needed to fly to Russia only as a transit stop. Yet after being collected in Moscow, taken to a military training camp and taught to operate a gun for the first time in my life...”*

Respondent -2

# NEPALI (SOLDIERS) IN UKRAINE CUSTODY

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# GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

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- Nepal is situated between two major regional powers, India and China, and maintains a strategy of balancing and non-alignment. Its involvement (even if indirect) in the Russia-Ukraine war complicates its diplomatic posture.
- Nepal's inability initially to fully track, regulate or prevent its nationals from becoming involved raises questions about state capacity in migration governance, border/visa controls, and international protections of citizens abroad.
- The recruitment of foreign nationals, including Nepalis, into the Russian military effort is part of Russia's strategy to shore up manpower, especially amid attrition.
- The involvement of Nepali nationals gives the conflict an even more global and multi-layered character—it's not solely a Europe-centric war but one whose repercussions (and participants) extend to South Asia.

# AFFECTED FAMILY MEMBERS.

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*“...I have heard that the salary was good and that within a year, the entire family would obtain permanent residence in Russia. Later on, I came to know that my husband Suresh Tumpabe – also a former Nepalese army soldier – signed up for the Kremlin’s “special military operation” in October, and is still stuck in Donetsk in occupied eastern Ukraine. It has been four months since he entered the red zone to fight for Russia. I’m in constant contact with him over WhatsApp. He is still alive, and he is desperate to return home. I appealed to the Nepalese foreign office’s consular department seeking my husband’s safe return. I was ill-informed about the severity of the war, but had heard. My husband has signed a one-year contract with the Russian army and cannot pull out until the contract ends. It was a mistake to join the Russian army amid the ongoing war. If we make it, we’ll meet again. If not, goodbye...” Respondent -3*

# AFFECTED FAMILY MEMBERS

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# AFFECTED FAMILY MEMBERS

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# GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

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- **India:** Given India's own relationship with both Russia and Nepal, and given reports of Indian nationals in similar circumstances, this situation raises cross-border migration, labour exploitation and security concerns.
- **China:** While less directly involved in this specific issue, China watches the region carefully; Nepal's exposure to foreign recruitment may influence bilateral talks (for example on labour migration, border control) and Nepal's broader foreign policy.
- **Human rights and international law:** If Nepalese nationals are found fighting for one side in the war, or being trafficked, it raises legal issues around mercenary activity, unlawful recruitment, prisoners of war, and state responsibility for protection of citizens.
- **Reputational risks:** For Nepal, the ranking of citizens dying or fighting in a foreign war for which they may not have full agency could affect its image, may draw criticism domestically and internationally.
- **Remittances & migration flows:** Since labour migration is a major source of foreign earnings for Nepal, risks to migrants (including being lured into conflict zones) may dampen willingness to migrate, or invite increased regulation and protection measures.

# PROTESTS IN KATHMANDU



# RETURNEE MIGRANTS

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- *“...I have no idea how to withdraw the money I still have in a Russian bank account. After I escaped from the military camp, it took me three days to get to Moscow. I was worried that by going to a bank to withdraw the money, I would risk getting caught. I can access my bank account on my phone, but I don't know if it's possible to transfer that money overseas. After seeing gruesome images on the frontlines, seeing your friends die next to you, realizing chances of survival is very slim.... you then realize the money is not worth it. I suffer searing pain every step I take from the metal fragments buried in his legs. That's why I escaped. Me and three of my friends paid \$2,000 each to human traffickers to get out from Ukraine and cross the border to Russia. I then reached Moscow and travelled to Kathmandu via New Delhi in December...” Respondents - 4*

# RETURNEE MIGRANTS

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# POST DEATH RITES

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*“...I and his nephew Raju wrap and bind leaves of Kush grass – which is sacred to Hindus – into an effigy for the funeral for Hari Aryal. Regarding another person Hopeless, we performed the ritual of Pritam's last rites on a dummy made of hay. Those who have died in the war—their bodies should be handed over to their families for their funeral rites Russia hasn't returned his body back to the family either. We had to perform Rajkumar's last rites using a dummy body made from grass. We kept his photo there and conducted his funeral. There was so much pain. We wish we could see him...” Respondent -5*

# POST DEATH RITUAL

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# POST DEATH RITUAL

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# ACTIVIST'S NARRATIVES

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- *“..We initiated the campaign to address the issue of Nepali citizens involved in Russian-Ukraine war. We are able to trace 156 identified deaths till date. Moreover, we have record of more than 190 injured fighters. Till date Nepal government has tested the DNA of approx. 20 persons. More than 300 people are still in unknown status and ... Even Ukraine has also captured 11 Nepali citizens...” Respondents 5*

# INJURED ( SOLDIER) IN THE HOSPITAL



sky news

# INJURED ( SOLDIER) IN KTM

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# RETURNEE'S NARRATIVES

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- “...I suffer searing pain every step I take from the metal fragments buried in my legs. I had served for more than a decade in Nepal's army before working for the police in Dubai and accumulated about \$15,000 in six months before being wounded and having to return to Nepal, and is using it to build a house. I managed to escape and my journey back to Nepal took via Moscow, Azerbaijan and Delhi. I also convinced several other villagers from Letang not to sign the contract...” Respondent -6

# INJURED (SOLDIER)

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# ACTIVIST'S NARRATIVES

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*“...I have been closely observing the affected families and noticing significant shifts in their psychological state. Many of the wives are young and in their most productive years. Some have begun forming relationships with other men. After the Russian government announced a compensation package of 70 million rubles and the offer of citizenship for the families of deceased soldiers, I sensed a new pattern emerging: a few wives have started to feel—consciously or subconsciously—that their situation might be more secure if their husbands do not return alive...”— Respondent 7*

# HUNGER STRIKE IN KATHMANDU



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- The observer notes that many wives are young, meaning they may be more vulnerable to emotional, economic, and social pressures during long separations.
  - Some wives are forming new relationships with other men, which the respondent perceives as a coping mechanism or adaptation to uncertainty, loneliness, or economic need.
  - The Russian government's announcement of 70 million rubles and citizenship for the family of a deceased soldier appears to influence the psychological landscape.
  - The respondent suggests that some wives have begun to think that their husband's death might bring more economic stability than his survival. Illustrates how conflict distorts normal social values and survival strategies.

# DELEGATION VISIT TO THE PM OF NEPAL.



# CONCLUSION...

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- By bringing HF and CPDA into dialogue, the paper argues that Nepali involvement in the conflict should be understood not merely as labor migration or voluntary enlistment, but as a manifestation of geopolitical inequality, discursive manipulation, and the instrumentalization of marginalized bodies in foreign wars.
- Nepali men who joined the Russian military often did so under conditions of economic pressure, misinformation, or trafficking networks. HF emphasizes that such contexts produce forensically vulnerable bodies : individuals who may die unidentified, unrecorded, or unclaimed. Poor documentation, lack of linguistic understanding during contract signing, and rapid deployment to frontlines create conditions for humanitarian crisis.