

A Perspective on Allowing Dual Nationality for Non-Resident Nepalis

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Movement of Nepalis to Foreign Lands

Nepalis have a long history of movement and emigration to the foreign lands. The tradition of Nepalis moving to India is as old the country itself. In fact, some people suggest that the first Non-resident Nepali (NRN) movement in Nepal was started by Gautam Buddha himself; and another famous son of Nepal, Tenzing Sherpa also eventually became a NRN.

In the past few decades, the temporary and permanent emigration from Nepal has accelerated at an unprecedented speed. In 2008, it is estimated that almost 1.7 million Nepalis work in the Middle East, and several East Asian countries. Furthermore, more than 300,000 Nepalis have emigrated to USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and other developed nations. Because of the large number of NRN in so many countries, and because the NRN desire to be connected to each other and their wish to remain emotionally linked to Nepal, some leaders of the NRN since 2002 have initiated an official organization of the NRN, the Non Resident Nepali Association (NRNA). In the past six years, the NRN movement has rapidly evolved and is in the phase of consolidating its institutional framework.

To fully assimilate in the new world, an increasing proportion of the NRN in developed countries are now taking the citizenship of their adopted countries. There are also many other practical reasons why many NRN have embraced the new citizenship. As the NRN wish to retain the Nepali citizenship, a major demand of the NRNA is that Nepal should grant dual citizenship to those NRN who have taken up a new nationality.

Dual Nationality Globally

Numerous countries grant dual citizenship in various forms. Most grant unrestricted dual nationality, while some countries, because of security and other reasons, limit the citizenship rights of their citizens who acquire another nationality. According to Geo-cities, the following table shows a spectrum of dual nationality privileges provided by different countries.

Dual nationality	Definition	Countries
Yes	Dual nationality is permitted with minimal exceptional prohibition.	59 countries
Yes/No	Dual nationality is normally permitted with considerable exceptional prohibition.	15 countries and Taiwan
No/Yes	Dual nationality is normally prohibited with considerable exceptional permission.	35 countries
No	Dual nationality is prohibited with minimal exceptional permission.	74 countries
No Data	The situation is unknown.	9 countries and Palestine

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Most developed countries permit dual nationality without any restrictions. Examples are USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, France, Ireland, Russia and numerous others. Among the developing countries too, granting of dual nationality is quite prevalent. For example, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Barbados, Philippines and many other countries allow dual nationality for their citizens without any restriction. Many others like, India, Sri Lanka, Slovenia and others grant dual nationality with certain limitations.

Implication of the Global Movement of Nepalis

The movement of her residents to foreign lands, although initially a loss for Nepal, should be seen in a positive light. It relieves the current unemployment pressure in Nepal, brings a high amount of remittance funds, and helps people who leave Nepal to obtain advanced education, earn higher incomes and to later assist people back home by sending money and helping them in education and supporting philanthropic works in Nepal. For example, in 2007, the Non Resident Nepalis (NRN) sent about 1 billion USD in remittance, more than 10% of Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This amount has buttressed the perennially frail Nepali economy, especially in the turbulent times of the past decade.

The NRNA has organized significant philanthropic projects in Nepal. It also regularly raises money for natural calamities in Nepal, and is increasingly involved in the developmental activities there. Although no firm date exists, anecdotal evidence suggests that the total NRN investment in Nepal as of 2008 may be close to 200 million USD.

Unlike the remittance from the Middle East, the contributions from the NRN in North America, Europe and Oceania is not always well documented. However, it is well known that the North American NRN, for example, have sent money to help their families back in Nepal, and organized hundreds of development projects throughout Nepal. On personal and family levels, each well-settled Nepali in the developed countries typically helps at least two other family members in Nepal to obtain higher education domestically or internationally.

Symbiotic Relationship Between Nepal and the NRN

Nepali media and living room chats are often filled with the frustration of the "brain-drain" that is caused by the emigration of educated and talented Nepalis. That may be a short term reality, but the long term benefits of the emigration far outweigh any temporary setback to Nepal. It is important and timely for Nepal to look at the Diaspora as a resource, as Ireland, Poland, Israel, India, China and other forward looking countries have long done. Israel was built by the Jewish Diaspora; the spectacular rise of China was made initially possible by the investment from the overseas Chinese; and the Non-resident Indians (NRI) have contributed so much in Indian business, economy, education and professionalism that the Government of India has finally granted dual nationality rights to the NRI, and has established a dedicated Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. The role of the Jewish Diaspora in the development and strengthening of Israel, particularly through financial aid and effective lobbying in Europe and North America, has been legendary.

NRN can help Nepal with professional skills, technical know-how, financial investment, educational and other service linkages to outside world, and to effectively lobby for Nepal's national interest in world. For example, during both the people's movement in 1990 and the Jana-Andolan in 2006, the NRN played a symbolic, sincere and especially in 2006, a critical role in helping bring democracy in Nepal.

The NRN wish to return to Nepal regularly and some will return to Nepal permanently to retire and do social work. However, for the reasons of financial and retirement benefits, they wish to retain the hard earned citizenship of their adopted countries.

Aspirations of the NRN

NRN also have many aspirations that Nepal government can help them with. NRN wish to maintain their properties in Nepal, they long to visit Nepal regularly without feeling like a foreigner, make investments in Nepal, and most importantly, like to feel that they are forever part of Nepal. Particularly the NRN who come to more developed countries in North America, Western Europe and Australasia to settle, desire to maintain strong emotional linkages to the motherland even when they live permanently in their adopted lands. Nepal should review what more developed and enlightened countries do for their citizens. The forward looking countries allow and encourage their nationals to keep the citizenship for life.

NRN feel that Nepal should allow its nationals who have taken up another nationality, to retain their Nepali citizenship. There could be a cut-off date for this, say 1960, or later, and this should be done retroactively so that former Nepali citizens can apply and regain their Nepali passports. This will resolve all the issues of the NRN: to maintain property, work in Nepal when they wish and also to participate in political process and bring new thoughts and blood in Nepal's political system. This scheme is well practiced in Israel, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, U.K., Australia, USA, Canada, Jamaica and many other countries. Italy even elects to its parliament a Non-resident Italian from several global regions.

Nepal will lose nothing by allowing Nepali citizens to retain their citizenship, but there is lot to gain by everyone. The NRN who have acquired the citizenship of developed countries would like to retain that to enjoy social security, pension, ease of travel, to be part of their families who usually stay in the adopted land, and to be able to vote in their adopted countries. If they remain non-citizens in the adopted countries, their lobbying capacities are drastically curtailed. By allowing dual nationality, Nepal gets to emotionally retain its educated and prosperous sons and daughters as its life-long citizens, and also enables them lobby more effectively for Nepal.

To grant dual nationality for NRN, Nepal government needs to do only a single change in law, that is to delete the clause in the Citizenship Act that says "by voluntarily taking up another nationality, his/her Nepali citizenship is automatically lost".

Conclusion

For foreseeable future, because of the inadequacy of economic and educational opportunities at home, Nepalis are likely to continue to immigrate to other parts of the world, mainly to North America, Europe and Australasia. Although in the short term it looks like a loss of talent and skill, experience of other countries, such as China and India, shows that in the long run the Nepali Diaspora will become a resource for Nepal. Many NRN will also return when the time is right from them and contribute to the "brain-gain" phenomenon as is being seen in Korea, China, Taiwan, India and elsewhere.

NRN wish to be inextricably linked to Nepal, contribute to its development, make investment and regularly or some even wish to permanently return to Nepal. A dual nationality regime will facilitate all of these aspirations for NRN.

Strengthening of the symbiotic relationship between NRN and Nepal is a win-win proposition for both parties. Nepal triumphs by capturing the resources and energy of its dynamic sons and daughters who left in search of a better life, adventure and pursuit of opportunities. The NRN community benefits by being solidly linked with its root emotionally, psychologically, financially and professionally.