

Labour migration: a socio-cultural factor for social transformation in Banke district, Nepal

Abstract

This study deals with labour migration as a sociocultural factor to transform society and improve human livelihoods. It explores how social transformation is reshaping social systems, social identities, social patterns and practices. Labour migration has been a top choice and household strategy for improving living standards and social status. This study responds to how labour migration is affecting local ethnic communities, in particular, Tharu communities, and how the process of social transformation is restructuring social practices, social identities, social values and norms. This study primarily uses qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the social transformation restructuring social, cultural and political aspects in the Tharu community. It approaches social transformation to examine the later social structures and human mobilities. The findings clearly show the processes of social transformation reforming the residents' living standards through the receipts of remittances and technological goods and services. Social identities are also reformed with a realisation of social integration. The socioeconomic status of the migrants' families has significantly improved. In addition, the existing social practices namely Kamaiyas (Bonded Labourers) and Sukumbasi (Slums) are removed from the Tharu communities. This study can contribute to the government and non-government-led development programs and projects as well as implement new policies and strategies to address migration-related issues in contemporary societies of Nepal and indeed in other regions of the world.

Keywords: acculturation, labor migration, modernization, remittances, social transformation

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Introduction

Labour migration, one of its categories, is defined mainly as transnational mobility seeking employment opportunities in the destination country. It includes different backgrounds such as high-skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled migrants.¹ Today, migration is taking place in different forms such as forced migration, return migration, refugees, asylum seekers, and so on. Whatever the migration type is, the migrants go across either internal territory or external borders due to socio-political clashes and uncertainties, and the expatriate whose settlements were lost because of natural calamities and construction projects.² Displacement affects the life of people in different ways and leads to stress and depression in human lives during the change-making process. The processes of social transformation are closely associated with the influence of labour migration. It is also considered a primary change in which society is organized and transcends the regular processes of gradual social change that are always at work.³ This implies a 'step-change in which all existing social patterns are asked and many are reconfigured. Hence, social transformations are intertwined with major changes in dominant economic, political and strategic relationships.

Labour migration has a long history of taking place over different times and in different world countries. Today, the major motivation is continued to search for more favourable job opportunities and that examines migration and explains the reasons behind the constitution of a substantial share of internal and international migration stocks. Besides labour or wage, there could be other reasons for migration such as conflicts, wars and political persecution, family reunification, educational opportunities and climate change. But, the Tharus in Mahadevpuri Village Development Committee are considering labour migration as a top choice and strategy of livelihood for promoting social and economic life. Due to the receipts by labour migration, the Tharus are getting rid of Kamaiyas (Bonded labourers) and

ultimately experiencing an improved life. They have also been active in social and political activities and are expanding their consciousness and freedom from bondage, and sprthe ead of new ideas through modern technologies.⁴ Thus, the migration trends have a certain type of implication for the Indigenous people's social and cultural dimensions. It is found that there are changes in the social dimension. The individual behaviours of Tharus have adopted the migrants' culture in the Terai and inner-Terai region.

The discussion on the development ramification of migration is replicated in the rich analytical and practical works on labour migration. Different scholarly writings commonly examine workers' determining factors for migration decisions in origin economies. Basic forms to make explanations people move have been developed in terms of the "pull-push" theory. The so-called pull factors are the most favourable factors which influence individuals to migrate from one place to another, while the push factors are bad circumstances, where people live and are forced to emigrate.⁵ The current scholarships also examine the effect of migration decisions on labour markets and extra outcomes in both origin and host economies. At the micro-level, some have seen migration as a household strategy for decision-making processes.⁶ And, some also regularly concentrate, in receiving countries, on the effects of migration on native populations and former immigrants, the labour supplement of immigrants, as well as, domestic economies, and the migration effect on households that send migrants – in particular the role of remittances– and on those that do not. Power dynamics among household members no doubt shape decision-making.⁷ Most often decisions are negotiated within the family, as part of a household strategy of economic survival or advancements. The migration of one family member may often lead to further migration of other members of the household either through family reunification procedures or through the development of formal and informal networks that facilitate the movement.⁸ At the macro

level, the outcomes of interest typically involve aggregate growth, human capital, poverty, overall inequality and bilateral trade flows.

Likewise, labour migration is an integral part of national and global economic development. Demographic transition theory^{9,10} says that with the development process, countries move from a pre-modern regime of high fertility and high mortality to a postmodern system in which both are low. These demographic transitions have important consequences on local labour markets and were, for instance, one factor behind the massive migration flows of Nepalese people two centuries ago after the signing of the Sugauli Treaty in 1816.¹¹ As people look for more and better jobs, they move from rural to urban areas, circulate within countries or across borders and migrate to different regions of the world. These moves can be temporary or seasonal or become permanent. Due to such migratory movements, the Tharu communities have been multicultural through the transformation of one culture to another. It is also argued that socio-cultural change is possible when labour migration takes place in traditional society. The process of cultural diffusion that existed in traditional society encompasses the socio-cultural interaction between indigenous groups and migrant groups.¹² Thus, labour migration has been a secondary choice to transform society based on different new social, cultural and political patterns. On the other hand, it has been established as a performance agency of social transformation in the present societies of Nepal.

Basically, this study was conducted to examine labour migration and its imperative factors on social, cultural and political dimensions in the transformation of society. It also analyses the processes of social transformation which is reshaping social, cultural, economic and political aspects, particularly in the Tharu communities of Banke district of Nepal.

Literature review

Theoretically, migration creates the physical gap between birth and destination place and creates mental farness—the migrants from origin to destination and vice-versa carry diverse languages, cultures, customs, norms and values along with them apart from the foreign currencies. The absence of cultural accommodation of non-migrants in the state policy creates cultural shocks between the culture of the host society and migrants. And also, social hierarchy arises between the migrants and the power is dominantly exercised by the richer over the poorer. Thus, there occurs upheaval in the social system.

Migration is a process of building a multicultural society and the other, is also a process of socio-cultural conflict between groups or social units if the voices of non-migrants are not accommodated.¹² Similarly, Castles¹³ also regards migration as part of the process of transforming social structures and political institutions occurring through fundamental shifts in global political, economic, and social relationships. In such a situation, both migrants and non-migrants start thinking in different ways to maintain balance in the forms of social cohesion and human relationship. As such, it also originates from social transformation and development.

This study tries to investigate how the migration of labour transforms society and develops individual social and cultural aspects. There are prominent scholars, and social scientists, especially Sociologists and Anthropologists, who have significantly contributed to the study of labour migration. The first and great Nepalese Anthropologist, Prof. Dor Bahadur Bista has given some descriptions of aspects of the socio-economic life of various ethnic groups of Nepal in his book “People of Nepal” (1967). Culturally, linguistically, the Tharus are different from other ethnic people.¹⁴ Likewise, Arjun Guneratne¹⁵

studied the Tharus of Chitwan and Dang districts in his book “Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal”. In his book, Guneratne overviews the migration trend of hilly people into the Terai and sociocultural changes in their society. Both scholars emphasized the process of labour migration from the hill to the terai region for improving individual livelihoods and local communities.

Relating to the previous reviews, Labour migration can be seen as the result of both supply-side (push) and demand-side (pull) factors.⁵ The conventional emphasis of the abstract scholarly works on migration has been on the micro-modelling of the migration decision, which rests both on the lifetime gain from moving and its costs. Human capital in this sense is considered a determinant in migration decisions, as the qualification level is associated with the prospect of seeking work and with the pay level at the destination regions (Haug, 2008). Thus, migration has primarily been a family strategy.³

Regarding labour migration, Castles¹⁶ conceptualises social transformation as an analytical tool to investigate how globalising forces influence local communities and national societies with highly-diverse historical experiences, economic and social patterns, political institutions, and cultures. It can also lead to favourable recipes for social and political action to facilitate communities to improve their livelihoods and cope with the consequences of global change. It can have both favourable and unfavourable outcomes for local communities and nation-states. Likewise, culture and identity play a vital role and cultural influences have prominence in the process of social transformation. For instance, secularization and the development of science have had great impacts on our thoughts and attitudes to legitimacy and authority, and have thus also formed social structures, systems and values.¹⁷

In the context of Nepal, households have become the primary decision-making unit for migration because they choose it for making a good livelihood. Complementary to the longer-term impact of family planning policies, labour migration overseas has been understood as instantly diminishing unemployment and underemployment, defusing social and political protest, and earning valuable foreign exchange. The compromised human rights of migrant workers have been rationalised based on that such migration is essential, but a transient attribute of economic transformation.¹⁸ Due to such a migration process, traditional values and customs have been changed with the receipts of remittances. In this vein, Le¹⁹ says that remittances are not only “income transfer flows” (including the remittance transfer with a humanitarian motivation for consumption and compensating low-income of family members), but are also “capital flows” (containing the remittance transfer for investment and business purposes with a self-interest). This flow helps the migrants’ families improve their living standards. In this respect, the Tharu migrants’ economic status has comparatively improved better than earlier. Even, their society is transforming with advanced technology, reformed cultural values, social systems and practices. Thus, labour migration has long been seen as a dominant factor in improving family living standards.²⁰

Theoretical framework

Migration is a global issue experienced everywhere in every season and time. Social transformation is one of the noticeable results of labour migration, which brings about both positive and negative consequences in global societies. Hence, it touches all types of societies in both developed and less developed regions through global forces with highly-diverse historical experiences, economic and social patterns, political institutions, and cultures.¹⁶ Globalisation is also bringing about new forms of social differentiation at national and international levels.¹⁶

In the context of South Asian regions, in particular Nepal, labour migration has been now a strategy for the improvement of living standards for Nepalese people. It is also important to conceptualize social transformation as a field of research, which can and should lead to positive recipes for social and political action to help communities improve their livelihoods and cope up with the consequences of global change. Relating to this, Castles³ opines in less-developed countries, the social transformation of modes of production and social relations encourages emigration in pursuit of standard living and higher security. He eventually finds the processes of social transformation, as a suitable label, to help in an argument of complication, interrelatedness, changeability, contextuality and multi-layered mediations of global change.

At the structural level, social transformation in developed countries is perceptible at the end of older industries, the reformation of labour forces, the erosion of welfare states, the disintegration of communities and the reshaping of social identities. The processes of social transformation in less-developed countries consist of agricultural intensification, destruction of rural livelihoods, erosion of local social orders, and restructuring of shanty towns within new mega-cities.³

Similarly, Polanyi²¹ sees the market liberalism of the nineteenth century as ignoring socioeconomic embeddedness (i.e., its role in achieving social goals laid down by politics, religion and social custom). He further emphasized the 'stark utopia' leading to a double movement—a protective counter-movement to re-subordinate the economy to society. His idea of the 'double movement' can be understood through the modern lens of the concept of agency. Social transformation processes are facilitated by local historical and cultural patterns, through which people develop changing forms of agency and resistance. These can emerge as religious or nationalist movements, but as individual- or family-level livelihood strategies, encompassing rural-urban or international migration. Based on Polanyi's ideas, Castles³ accepts social transformations as intertwined with fundamental changes in dominant economic, political and strategic relationships. Due to this reason, social transformation, as Castle argues, affects national societies, local communities, and individuals.

To make it more comprehensive, the following conceptual framework illustrates the three major factors of social transformation (Figure 1).

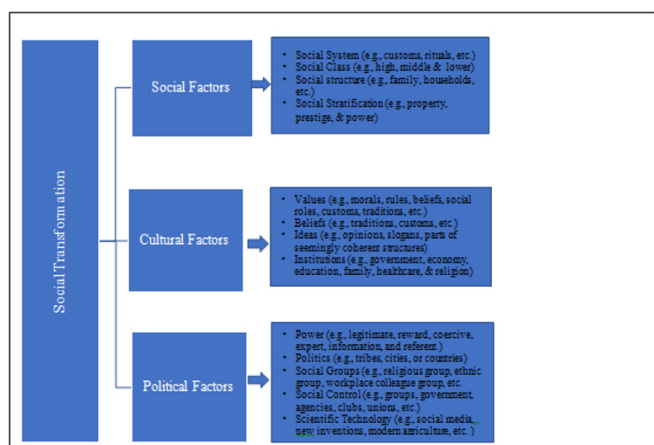


Figure 1 Social, cultural and political factors of social transformation.

The three factors of social transformation, particularly selecting the major components from each, have been evaluated and further discussed in the following sections.

Material and methods

This study focuses on the social transformation and development in Mahadevpuri VDC-8 of Banke district, which consists of 4 wards: 6,7,8 and 9. The research site is a multicultural society; however, the majority is of the Tharu population. The universe is Tharu households for this study and 90 households were selected through random sampling as the quantitative data. This study used mixed methods: quantitative and qualitative. In this study, I used social transformation as an analytical tool to synthesize the collected data and to gain the actual research findings.

The present study was conducted from the emic perspective as the researcher belonged to the Tharu Community. This study took place from November 2018 to April 2020 in Mahadevpuri VDC of Rapti-Sonari Rural Municipality of Banke district at different times and seasons. The use of ethnographic methods allowed the researcher to understand explicit and implicit causes of social transformation. Ethnographic research took as a point of departure that the researcher was making sense of the daily activities and incidents naturally taking place in the study site.^{22,23} Likewise, the researcher participated in the Tharu milieu over a long time, observing what they did and at the same time asking questions to find out what meanings they attached to what they did.^{23,24} Likewise, the researcher spent one and half years in the physical and written fields for the data too well from the relationships present in the research field. For this study, ethnography was purposively applied to gain a deeper understanding of the social dynamics of audiences and the affective dimensions of their behaviour.²⁵ The researcher added that it was highly appropriate to the context of event environments, where the survey uses could halt the flow of the event experience for audiences, or be made impossible by the structure of the event.

In-depth interview(s) was also carried out long-duration, face-to-face to look at individuals' behaviours and to observe the concrete results of social or group interaction. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to focus and elaborate on key points of interest while interviewing ward officials, government retired teachers, aama samuha (women groups) and social workers. A three-hour interview with key respondent A gave the researcher a clear vision of the shifting process of sociocultural practices in the Tharu community. And then, the researcher interviewed Badghars (Tharu leaders) about the existing occurrences in their locality. As open-ended questions were asked, they responded.

We, the Tharu people have changed our cultural values and practices due to both internal and external migration. Most importantly, our society is transforming far different than in the past. Today, young generations are imposing to assimilate modern cultures to adjust to society. They should have come with sociocultural practices of old generations to protect and preserve the ethnicity and/or indigenosity of Tharu. But, in the name of modernization and individual prosperity, young generations are counter-culturing the old generations. Even, they are developing new ways of their lifestyles (Field notes, May 2019).

Badghars clearly emphasized the declining process of Tharu cultures and traditions formerly existed in old generations. Due to the migration of labour and other migratory movements, their cultures have been hybridized and are dominated by other's cultures. Also, social practices such as marriage systems, daily habits and behaviours are changing day by day. As a result, it is merely less of finding the pure culture of the Tharu people. However, it has improved their social status and living standards. They have now adopted a new pattern of living based on the individuals' requirements for a social life.

Similarly, the focus group was applied as it typically involves a group of participants and a researcher who facilitates the group discussions as a moderator.²⁶ And also, the researcher often confirms that the particular topics of research interest are discussed by the entire group in hopes of extracting data and self-disclosure that might otherwise be withheld in the traditional researcher-interviewee setting.²⁶ FGD (s) was held in a variety of settings where government officials, researchers, business persons, religious groups, and social workers actively participated to discuss sociocultural factors of labour migration and its impacts on the daily lives of Tharu people. It significantly assisted me as a researcher to explore the sociocultural factors that were causing social transformation in the Tharu community. I formed a total of 5 groups of migrants' families, mahila samuha (women groups), Badghars (Tharu leaders), social workers and government officials to discuss why the Tharu population were migrating abroad and what sociocultural changes were occurring in Tharu communities. I asked each group for a semi-structured questionnaire to smoothly continue group discussions. They replied:

Labour migration has supported rural economic activities like agricultural growth, operation of local businesses and homestay tourism. It has also helped reduce unemployment and improve households' long-term welfare in the source country (Field notes, December 2019).

Responses of each group of participants were differently pronounced, but they were similar in meaning. Their replies facilitated the researcher to conclude that the departure of young active people, gender imbalances and financial and social remittances all transform conditions in the local community. Similarly, the impact of immigration in host areas is realised in the way it affects economic restructuring and social relations in local communities.²⁷

Participant observation was useful because it required me as a researcher to become involved as a participant in a social setting and make descriptive observations of myself and others in the setting.²⁵ I repeatedly visited the study site at different times and seasons to observe sociocultural changes in the Tharu community. I gained a depth understanding of naturalistic settings and their members' ways of seeing. And then, I established a good rapport within a community to address and speak on the grey areas that were often ignored by other researchers.²⁸ Through mutual contact and interaction between the participants, I successfully reached local people's perceptions of labour migration.

Eventually, the researcher used a case study as being suitable for a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth investigation²⁹ that can provide a more nuanced understanding of socio-cultural transformation at the local level (Kneafsey, 2000, as cited in Zielinski, 2020). This study was a significant method to acquire real-life histories and events about rural development that occurred due to various migratory movements, especially labour migration. Through a case study of key respondent B, a returnee from Saudi Arabia after 2- years of foreign employment, the researcher perceived the changing patterns of social norms and values previously existed in the Tharu community. Due to the migration of labour, the receipt of remittances has supported his family to fulfil the requirements. He further added:

Remittance has brought lots of changes to the Tharu community. Changes in native patterns of culture are one of the major changes in the locality. Dashain, Maghi Sankranti (New Year of Tharus), Holi, Astimki (Krishna Janmashtami), and Atwari are native customs of Tharus, but due to the effects of remittance and globalization, Tharus are adopting other's cultures like; Tihar, English New Year, Christmas, and Birth Day Party. Due to modern technology, traditional

agro-farming is replaced with a new and scientific farming system. There is a few Oxen Plough to dig Khetwa and Bari (irrigated and non-irrigated farmland) in Tharu villages, but there are huge uses for tractors for agricultural purpose. There is also a shortage of labour due to the flow of remittance. If we are concerned about houses and the structure of houses, there are decreasing traditional patterns of Tharu houses due to the modern designed RCC buildings. But remittance has also brought a positive livelihood among Tharus such as self-employment, self-sufficiency and no-dependency on Sahu and Mahajan (Businessman or money lender) during the financial crisis. Women are even more empowered and their children's educational level has improved significantly. In this regard, remittance has helped us to establish a better livelihood and promote social development (Field Notes, November 2018).

Based on the real-life story of respondent B, it is obvious that labour migration has been a dominant factor in Tharus' communities to transform their traditions and cultures. For households, remittance has been a primary source to manage familial issues and social behaviours to adjust to a respective society. Also, receipts of remittance have supported each household to be self-dependent, self-reliant and self-sufficient. Hence, labour migration is a prior strategy of the household for survival.

In a similar manner to the key respondent B, respondent C, a permanent resident of Perani Gaon and by profession, a government teacher, also viewed labour migration as a household choice for economic growth. He commented:

Agriculture is the main occupation in our locality, and at any cost, we have to do it because there is no alternative. Since youth migrate to foreign employment, the land remains uncultivated/barren. Even, they show no interest in agriculture after they return). Local agricultural patterns are becoming more capitalized day by day due to the effects of remittance. There is also a shortage of labour in agriculture because labourers have an open choice more than that in the past (Field notes, September 2019).

According to the personal views of respondent C, it is indisputable that labour migration is becoming one of the major factors affecting their culture as well as agricultural decline. Due to labour migration, lands remain uncultivated throughout the year. Also, the migrants show no interest in cultivation after they return. They follow others' cultural practices instead of their own. Likewise, they demolish their sociocultural practices. In this line, respondent D, a member of Mahila Samuha (women group) regards the receipts of remittance as the ultimate solution for regulating daily familial activities. She furthermore added:

Remittance has supported local people to improve their livelihoods and create local employment or opportunities. Tharu Culture has been hybridized, and as a result, Tharu's identity is gradually disappearing (Field notes, February 2020).

It is a notable remark that Tharus' cultural identity is insusceptible to extinction along with the crossed culture. Labour migration can promote social transformation as well as rural development, but there mixes a pure culture with another. And also, local people can merely experience high living standards, instead, they lose their pre-existing culture and traditions. Therefore, it is a challenge for the Tharu population to maintain their local culture on one hand and to accept another culture on the other.

Conversely, Respondent E, the Secretary of Naya Gaon Homestay viewed it differently about labour migration. He said:

Labour migration has dominantly affected our lives. Abroad knowledge and skills along with remittance supported the operation of homestay tourism in our village. Also, it has been the most required for the protection and preservation of Tharu cultures. It is a source of income and a means of quality life. It has also supported us to run local businesses for our survival and promotion of our culture. (Field notes, April 2020).

Respondent E highly emphasized the process of adopting foreign knowledge and skills for running a local business such as homestay tourism. He also indicated that labour migration ultimately helps promote local culture and traditions. Similarly, respondent F, the President of Naya Gaon Homestays opined:

Homestay tourism is a gain of labour migration which is supporting local people to run local businesses to promote local cultures and rural development. She also emphasized that women’s empowerment is only possible when they are provided with fundamental rights and freedom. She also highlighted the improvement of women’s economic status in the locality. Likewise, Mahila Samuha (Women Groups) has been established to conduct local programmes as well as campaigns to empower women groups. (Field notes, April 2020)

Overall, the excerpts of different case studies show the process of labour migration brings both negative and positive effects in any society. Noticeably, it has carried sociocultural changes and the promotion of living standards in the Tharu community. It is thus a means of sustaining the rural economy and social capital in the study site.

Results

The social transformation in the Tharu community of Mahadevpuri VDC is found in terms of language, family size, religion, occupation, farming system, and technologies. Labour migration has brought both favourable and unfavourable effects in Tharu communities. It has transformed society and created holistic development based on certain forms and patterns. The following tables are presented to illustrate the changing scenarios: (Table 1)

Table 1 Respondents by migrants’ language

Languages	No of respondents	Percentage
Dagaura	27	30
Desauriya	36	40
Nepali	18	20
Hindi	3	3.33
Other	6	6.67
Total	90	100

Source: Field Visit, 2018.

In the given table, variables of migrants’ languages are shown with numbers and percentages to indicate the variation between languages practised by different ethnic groups in the study site.

Tharus are one of the pioneer indigenous people in the Terai. They have their mother tongue. The structures of society and migration have contributed to changing their mother tongue from different periods of history. The migrant population has changed their mother tongue. However, more than one-third of the Tharus have changed their mother tongue. This is because the Tharus have been dominated by the language of migrants from the hills and Himalayas. International languages such as English have also impacted the Tharu language. Based on the data, it can be claimed that migrant groups have preserved their language, but the Tharu language is being transferred day by day. Tharus are perceiving it as a negative change, and it is

the dominance of the migration population. In this respect, society is transferring to the form of modernization and cultural diversity (Table 2). The following table shows the formation of family size which is a noticeable change in society that the local people experience very often in their locality.

Table 2 Respondents by migrants’ family structure/size

Family Structure	No. of respondents	Percentage
Nuclear	42	46.67
Joint	48	53.33
Total	90	100

Source: Field Visit, 2018.

Formerly, Tharu people normally had an extended family system. Some live in longhouses, which may hold up to 150 people in a family.³⁰ But due to the migratory movements, family size has been reduced. The nuclear family norms of migrants have influenced the Tharus families. This has been changing gradually in Tharu communities. From my field visit, it is concluded that the size of the Tharu family has changed and the nuclear family size has been adopted by Tharus. The older Tharus want to continue their extended family size, however, younger Tharus want to adopt a smaller family size. In this regard, there is conflict in the transformation of society (Table 3).

Table 3 Respondents by migrants’ religion

Religions	Number of followers	Percentage
Hinduism	78	86.67
Buddhism	2	2.22
Islam	-	-
Kirant	-	-
Christian	6	6.7
Others	4	4.44
Total	90	100

Source: Field Visit, 2018.

This table shows the process of converting the migrants’ religion into another based on their personal choice and secular rights. As Hinduism is a major religion in Nepal, it has been significantly changing due to migratory movements.

The transformation and development of any religion like Hinduism are homogenous in all migrant communities. Generally, the tendencies have led them from community and caste belief systems and practices to widen more universalistic definitions of Hinduism that cut across local and caste differences. Since the origin of religion, it is administered by Brahman priests (Pandits) who constitute the only group distinguished by caste rank and ritual cleanliness. Development of the Sanatan Dharm and the decline of all smaller sects may be associated with the growth among the non-migrants of a realisation to be all Terai in a multicultural society, where only this dimension of their social personality was important and all better distinctions of caste, ritual, and belief were condemned and disregarded. The rise of such a religion may also be attributed to the concern to develop a form of Hinduism comparable to other religions.¹² In the study site, the majority is of Hinduism, however, there is the practice of accepting other religious beliefs. The creed in Hinduism is declining heavily, as people understand its negative aspects, which harms the Hindus’ dignity. Nowadays, people are welcoming doctrines of different religions and non-regions. In this respect, the dominant factors of religion are transforming society with both positive and negative effects (Table 4).

Table 4 Respondents by agricultural tools and techniques

Agricultural tools & techniques	Number of consumers	Percentage
Traditional Tools	27	30
Modern Tools	63	70
Total	90	100

Source: Field Visit, 2018.

This present table indicates the changing patterns of using technologies for agricultural purposes. This is due to the receipts received by the migrants' families. In absence of males, women take the major responsibilities to cultivate the land, as a result, they alone can not farm and hire either labourers or modern technologies for cultivation.

The traditional occupation of indigenous Tharus is agriculture. During the non-migration period of the inner-Terai, almost all Tharus were involved in an agricultural occupation. When the migration takes place in the Tharu villages of Terai, then an agricultural shift is found. Based on the ethnographic inquiry, a century ago all of the Tharus were involved in agriculturally based occupation. But now, the occupational status of Tharus is gradually changing, as they migrated abroad for foreign employment. By the receipts of remittances, they have been capable of sending their children to prominent schools and colleges for higher studies. Education is the third eye of man. The migrants' children are well-educated and well-conscious about the role of agriculture in human lives and social development. Hence, they are applying modern tools and technologies (70%) for agricultural growth. They are now self-sufficient and fully supportive of the local and national government in different aspects. Even, the society they live in is significantly transferred as well as modernized (Table 5).

Table 5 Respondents by migrants' occupation

Occupation	No of respondents	Percentage
Agriculture	27	30
Trade/Business	9	10
Self-employment	21	23.33
Organizational service	15	16.67
Education/Training	18	20
Total	90	100

Source: Field Visit, 2018.

The given table reflects the changing patterns of occupations. This happens as the local people migrate abroad and changed the pre-existing concepts. A short-term and/or long term teaches the migrants to change the profession of their suitability and reliability for their livelihoods.

The traditional occupation of indigenous Tharus is agriculture. During the non-migration period of the inner-Terai, almost all Tharus were involved in an agricultural occupation. They adopted it as a major occupation for their survival. But, the trends of migration brought about socio-economic changes in their lives. The results clearly explain that the local people are changing their occupations. The remittance has changed the total functions of the migrants' families. Non-migrants also want to do other occupations to mimic the desire for prestigious jobs, which are done by migrant people. This also supports Tharus to change its occupational pattern. Changing occupational patterns have also been linked with the educational status of Tharus. At the beginning of Tharu's civilization, there was no type of educational system. Migrants were educationally oriented in Indian or foreign institutions (Sigdel, 2012). Due to this academic

knowledge and information, they are finally succeeding in making a change in their occupation. Consequently, there occur implicit or explicit effects on social transformation and development (Table 6).

Table 6 Respondents by consumers of transportation technologies

Items of transportation technologies	Total number of consumers	Percentage
By-cycles	30	33.33
Motor Bikes	36	40
Tractors	18	20
Cars	6	6.67
Total	90	100%

Source: Field Visit, 2018.

The following table reveals the rapid change of transportation technologies mostly utilised by the migrants after being economically stronger than past. Previously, local people used to travel on foot or using a bicycle, but now the migrants have replaced them with motorbikes, cars and so on. It has happened as they observed the modern lifestyles while staying abroad on foreign employment or for study.

The traditional transportation technology of Tharus is Lariya (ox cart) used for carrying loads and for other purposes. But a gradual change occurred in the use of transportation technologies only after Jana Andolan-I (People's Movement in 1990). During the Sugauli Treaty of 1815 and 1860 with British-India, the Madheshi people, including Tharu, were taken as a minority group. Until the 1940s, they were compulsorily asked to have an entry permit to visit Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal.³¹ After active participation in political movements, the Tharus have been aware of their rights and lifeways. They migrated to foreign countries for the improvement of their personal life. By remittances, they availed better means of transportation for their travel from one place to another. The findings also show that Tharus are commonly using motorbikes as a means of transportation for moving. However, they have other modes of transport, for example, bicycles, tractors, and cars. Among these modes, motorbikes remain the most convenient for them to move. Thus, modern technologies are transforming their social systems.³²⁻³⁶

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly show that labour migration has been taken as a primary household strategy to move on to foreign employment for the improvement of the household's economic condition. It also addresses the migration of labour as a driving factor for transforming society with certain modifications and developing households' livelihoods.³⁷

Previously, residents used to live with traditional values, but now they are modifying each of their habits, behaviours and daily practices based on their economic condition and personal traits. This is proved in each table with a certain modification. Table 1 replicates the acceptance of other national or international languages, which helps in assimilating another culture. No matter how worth it is for the coming generation. Similarly, Table 2 also shows the changing patterns of the household size of the Tharu family. Today's generation is preferring a smaller size to a larger size family. That is to say that today's youths are reluctant to accept a joint or large family due to more family roles and responsibilities to bear with. The remaining Tables 3-6 illustrate the transformation of traditional practices into a new model or the so-called modernisation. It has been so because of the receipt of labour migration. Each household has realised its importance for fulfilling their needs and wants and for improving their livelihoods. In addition,

they have advanced their socioeconomic condition only through the receipt of labour migration.^{38,39}

Overall, labour migration has supported the residents with financial growth and modification of their entire lives. It has also been the primary source of income generation for a living. For each household in the present societies, it has been a crucial part of income generation activity. It is hence unavoidable for the citizens of developing and less developed countries. In both regions, social transformation appears as a gradual process and affects all types of society in various sectors including the economy, technology, politics, the media, culture, and the environment.⁴⁰

Conclusion

This paper discusses the social transformation taking place in the contemporary societies of Nepal. It explores how labour migration is restructuring social systems and cultural practices. The receipt of remittances is playing a significant role in changing all these social systems and human lives. It has become the primary source of income generation for improving living standards and social status. The research findings conclude paradigmatic shifts in Tharu communities only because of labour migration. Therefore, labour migration for them has been the first choice and household strategy in order to reform social systems, human mobilities and social identities. Culture has played a significant role in reforming social values, norms and daily behaviours. In this sense, cultural influences have had great significance in the process of social transformation, which brings about favourable recipes to facilitate local communities to improve people's livelihoods in developing and less developed countries as well as bear the unfavourable consequences of global change. Due to globalising forces, local communities produce wider social and cultural dimensions and promote local employment opportunities and local labour markets. Human capital and social personalities are formed with a realisation of social integration and human development. The society also leads to modernisation and global networking on the basis of cultural transformation. Most importantly, the existing traditional practices such as Kamaiyas (Bonded labourers) and Sukumbasi (Slums) are being removed from Tharu communities. In this respect, labour migration can be seen as a key factor and/or social agency to drive sociocultural transformation in Nepalese societies, particularly in Tharu communities.⁴¹

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Conflicts of interest

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