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## **Livelihood Strategy of the Tharu People: A Study of Kalika Municipality**

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### **Abstract**

*The study focuses on livelihood patterns of the Tharu community of Kalika municipality. Conceptually livelihood connotes the means of activities entitlements and assets by which people make a living. Due to the proximity to the market, the influence of the urbanization is more apparent in the Tharu village. In the study area, most of the households follow the multiple occupations besides agriculture. The role of agriculture activities in their life is substantial. Although a few households sell their crops, most of them sell the vegetable. The livelihood strategy of the Tharu community in the study area is in transition. It shifted from agriculture to non-agricultural one. The household assets of this community have greatly influenced the process of adaptation of new strategy or modification of traditional occupation. Economic development and other economic activities, which change the surrounding environment of the people of a particular area, have to change their way of life to adapt with the changing environment. Livelihood difficulty reflects on unprofitable farming activities employment, which may not even allow the poor family to meet their basic needs. So, it is inevitable to identify and disseminate the effective livelihood strategy, especially, for the improvement of livelihood of the Tharu. It is necessary to ensure access to resources and increase social and political participation of the Tharu community for the integral development of rural community in Nepal.*

**Key words:** Livelihood, Tharu, Chitwan, Economy, Population

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### **Introduction**

Tharu is one of the indigenous nationalities living in the southern part of Nepal. Total population of Tharu was 1734470 in 2011. In the context of Chitwan, Tharus are known as the first people who came from Chitwan from the southern border. Total population of Tharus in

Chitwan are 60234 (DCC, 2018). Their settlement spread in the Rapti and Madi valleys. The traditional territory of the Tharu is called Tharuban or Tharwat, the southern-forest region of the Siwalik Hills and the southern part of the Terai. The origin of the Tharu tribes is not clear. Some say that they may be migrants from the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, India. There is a variation on the narration of the historians of the origin of the Tharu. The scholars who had tried to trace the origin of the Tharu offer conflicting views on the subject. However, regarding the Tharu's origin, entry and migration to Nepal, there are not definite dates or evidence to support any of those theories. According to Nesfield (1885), the name Tharu is derived from the word 'Thar' which is the colloquial dialect means, 'a jungle'. Thus, the Tharu is one, who resides in the forest, 'a forest man'. The Tharu are said to be the descendants of the Rajput women who fled with their domestic servants from the Muslim invasion rather than fall victim to their enemies. After a long time living without their spouses, they started to live with their servants and had children by them. These offspring were the Tharu. Even today, they have the tradition where Tharu women push a plateful of food toward their husbands with their feet. This implies that they possess Rajput blood and are of higher status than their husbands (Nevil, 1901).

Another theory for the Tharus' origins suggest that after Buddha attained Nirvana and Buddhism flourished, the Mahasagahik and Sthiver school were established. The Kpilvastu's Shakyas included toward Sthvir and were known as Sthvirbadi or Sthvir. Latter this was corrupted into Tharu (Crooke, 1896). Trace their origin to the word 'Tharu' denoting a 'wine bibber'. Tharus are seen to have many Dravidian characteristics. Dravidians are a group of intermixed peoples, mainly Tamil, who are found in south India and in northern Sri Lanka. However, in a minute study, difference can be seen. They are in short figure and are not heavily structured. Their facial features exhibit nasal roots that are depressed so that they tend to have short low noses. However, some of them have wide nostrils too. Their eyes are slanted but do not have epicanthi's fold, which is a Mongoloid racial stock characteristic. Their skin is dark brown to fair complexion, but some are extremely dark. Their lips are of the medium thickness and they have straight black hair. Chitwane Tharus' average height is nearly one and half meters. They have wheat-brown complexions, low nasal roots with wide flat nostrils, slanted and integument lips with an eversion (turn outward or inside out) between the upper and lower lips. They have more Mongoloid eyes and their physiques are strong, wiry and sturdy.

The concept of sustainable livelihood is an attempt to go beyond the conventional definition and approach to poverty eradication. The previous definition were found to be narrow because they focused only on certain aspect of manifestation of poverty such as low income or did not consider other vital aspect of poverty such as vulnerability, social inclusion, etc. It's now identified that more attention must be paid to the various factors and process which are either constraints or enhance poor people's ability to make a living economically, ecologically and socially sustainable manner. The sustainable livelihood concept gives more coherent and integrated approach to poverty eradication. In this way this approach has to be understood basically as a tool to understand poverty in responding the poor people's view and their own understanding of poverty (Krantz, 2001).

Although Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development was the first international forum that had given the legitimacy on the concept of sustainable livelihood. Robert Chamber and Gordon were the first to give the composite definition of sustainable livelihood. The sustainable livelihood further gained legitimization in 1992 by United Nations conference on Environment and Development. According to Drantz (2001), the conference expanded the concept especially in the context of Agenda 21 and advocating for the achievement of sustainable livelihood as a broad goal for poverty eradication (Table 1).

**Table 1: Sustainable Livelihood Models**

Chambers	UNDP	DFID, OXFAM	CARE	MOSER
Tangible (stores, resources)	Human	Human	Human	Labor
Intangible	Social	Social	Social	Economic and Social infrastructure
Claims for material, moral or practical support.	Natural	Natural	Economic	Housing
Opportunity to access resources	Physical	Physical		Household Relation
	Economic	Economic		Social capital

### Livelihood Outcomes

Livelihood Outcomes are achievement or output of livelihood strategy such as more income increased, well being reduced, vulnerability improved, food security and more sustainability. Here, the term livelihood outcome represents the achievement of the Tharu household after adopting new livelihood strategy. From study there is no equal achievement in the entire respondent household. The household whose member works in the urban employment market with some sort of skill (driving, carpentry, cycle repairing, painting, house building and electricity) earns more than other household of their village. The new generation of such household have left their origin and settled permanently in the city. Others who are living in their own place have invested their income in different family needs. Buying food is their first priority need, as these households cannot produce enough food for the whole year. After this, they invested their income in the education of their children. Such households have admitted their children in private school leaving the government for the quality education. After these they spend their income in health and for luxurious goods such as mobile, television, radio, etc. If they have more amounts after these, they have also invested their income in repairing old house or for the new house. This household livelihood outcome seems more sustainable as there is regular income.

The other categories of household are those who either work in city in off farm activities or in their own village as labor work. There is no drastic significant achievement in such household.

The limited income due to lack of skill and more seasonal nature of their work has been made their life more vulnerable than ever. Most of all their income they spent collecting food for day and night. Due to economic crises in the household, they are compelled to send their children to the work leaving the school. The loss of their natural assets (land), the food insecurity in the household has been increased than in the past. Children of such household suffer from many diseases due more workload and less nutritive food.

The household who does the business of land and housing earns more. Their standard of leaving is much higher than others. They live in modern concrete building with modern household assets. Motorbike, telephone, standard clothes and many more are nothing for them. They send their children in the qualitative school of the city, goes in private hospital for the treatment, have balance diet. The income from the selling the land is not the regular income and therefore the achievements from this strategy cannot be considered the sustainable rather appears as a more vulnerable.

## Methodology

The study has been based on qualitative and quantitative research paradigm and followed both descriptive and analytical research design. Qualitative information analyzed through descriptive way and quantitative data scrutinized by following analytical research design. Both secondary and primary source of data has been used for this study. Books, articles and already published other materials have used as secondary source. Primary data were collected from field survey questionnaires and, observation. 20 individual Tharus aged above 20 years aged group were chosen as sample population for this study. Sample has been selected through cluster sampling method and only Kalika municipality ward no. 4 and 5 Padampur were participated in this study. Conclusion has been drawn through data analysis and perception of the researcher what he has perceived at the time of field visit.

## Socio Economic Background of the Respondents

In this study 20 individual Tharu households were randomly selected for this study. Each of the wards ten house households were selected for this study (Table 2).

**Table 2: Socio Economic Background of the Respondents**

Age	No.	%	Religion	No.	%	Education	No.	%	Occupation	No.	%
15	5	25	Hindu	10	50	Class 9	8	40	Farmer	12	60
16	10	50	Buddha	4	20	10	8	40	Business	6	30
17	5	25	Other	6	30	11	4	20	others	2	10
Total	20			20			20			20	

**Source:** Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 shows the social characteristics of the respondents. Most of the respondents are from famer background. 30% are from business and rest of other adopts other occupation. While analyzing age component 25 are age of 15 and 50% are age of 16 and 25% are age of 17 years. Similarly, 40 % are from class 9, 40% from class 10 and 30% are from class 11. In the same way, data shows that 50% are Hindu, 20% are Buddha and 30 % are others.

### Livelihood Diversification

The most important elements of livelihood strategies in pre-urban environment is income diversification. Access to a number of assets determines the extent to which the socioeconomic and spatial characteristics translate into opportunities rather than constraints for the poor households. Transformations in the ways in which households and individuals make a living are important aspect for traditional environment. In such areas most of all households involve multiple occupations ranging from farming to services to processing and manufacturing. To adopt multiple occupation for them is therefore becomes imperative. Diversification can be described as a survival strategy for vulnerable households and individuals who are pushed out of their traditional occupations and who must resort to different activities to minimize risks and make ends meets (Akkoyunlu, 2015).

Involvement of the people in multiple occupations reflects the livelihood diversification of the study area.

**Table 3: Factors behind Shifts Away from Farming**

<b>Factors pushing people out of farm farming</b>	<b>Factors pulling people away from Farming</b>
Low crop productivity resulting from increasing infertility with loss of fallow, (and a reluctance to invest in the land due to insecure tenure).	Perceptions of higher rates of return from alternative occupations
Removal of farm land (landlessness or near landlessness)	Possibility of commuting
Higher labor costs (due to higher costs of living)	Nonfarm jobs give immediate cash)

Source: DFID, (2002). Sustainable Livelihood Guidance Sheet

**Table 4: Multiple Occupational Involvements by Household**

Involvement	Households
AG+Wage labor (Skilled)	5
AG+Wage labor (Unskilled)	8
AG+Service	3
AG+Business	2
AG+ Foreign employment)	2
AG+Wage labor +Business	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2020

Human Capital represents the skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health that together enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies and achieve their livelihood objectives (DFID, 2002). The importance of this cannot be exaggerated which directly contribute to achieve better livelihood outcome on the one hand and on the other stimulate other assets to strengthen them. People, who possess good health, better skill and required knowledge, might have better access on employment and earning, for deriving better livelihood outcomes. Many people, therefore, regard the ill health or lack of education as core dimension of poverty (DFID, 2002). Therefore, human capital is highly dependent on adequate nutrition, health care, safe environmental condition and education.

Labour is most important assets for the poor people, basically in urban and peri- urban setting. If one has adequate skill, s/he has better chances for the job. It is also likely to have more income. In the reverse condition manual labor that does not have necessary skill is paid less. Most of the members of household sell their labor (in the form wage laboring) to derive livelihood. This includes household who use it as primary occupation and who use it as secondary occupation. However, all the labor of the study areas is not equipped with required skill. Table 5 gives the insight of labor force of the study area.

**Table 5: Person Involving in Wage Labor**

Wage Labor	Carpentry	Electrician	Cycle/Shop	Driving	Veterinary	Total
Skilled	2	2	3	3	1	11
unskilled	-	-	-	-	-	9
Total	-	-	-	-	-	20

**Source:** Field Survey, 2020

Most of the young Tharus have better earning with either electrician, shop, driving or similar with need of market. People are traditionally associated with carpentry skill and have been able to earn their livelihood. Even the youth, who are learning new style and design, are working most of them throughout the year in the city to earn more. All these shows better idea on the relation between earning and skill.

### **Physical Capital**

Physical capital includes housing, tools and equipment that people own, rent or use and public infrastructure that they have access to (Rai, 2004). Affordable transport, safe shelter and buildings, adequate water supply and sanitation, clean affordable energy and access to information (Communications) public infrastructure associated with physical assets. Lacks of these assets are considered as core dimension of poverty. Without adequate access to services such as: water, food, energy, health facilities, housing, they spend much of their time in non-productive sector

Almost Five percent people have their own telephone. Others get this service from their nearest neighbors, or shop. 20 percent households have TV and 99 percent people have access on Radio. Lack of access to basic services such as water and sanitation is a crucial issue in pre-urban environment. No serious problem of water resources was found in study area. They get water from their private Tap and well.

### **Social Capital**

The process of urbanization is increasing the migrants in the study area raising the threat to inter household relation. As a result, the community and inter household mechanism are being heterogeneous leading communal violence and social fragmentation. And these are ultimately loosening social ties; competition for access to scarce resources and the widening gap between rich and poor. The social encroachment in this traditional community is more visible in study area. However, no information about the severe disputes and violence were found.

### **Financial Capital**

Financial Capital denotes the financial resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives. The definition used here is not economically robust, in that it includes flows as well as stocks, and it can contribute to consumption as well as production. However, it has been adopted to try to capture an important livelihood building block, namely the availability of cash or equivalent that enables people to adopt different livelihood strategies (DFID, 2002).

## Conclusion

The livelihood strategy of Tharu community in the study area is in transition. It is shifted from fishing, cannoning and gold panning as a primary source of livelihood to agricultural and agricultural to non-agricultural one. The evidences collected from the field, suggest that rate of socio-economic change in Tharu community is high. However, gradually Tharu communities in Patihani are also in the process of shifting from agriculture based to non-agriculture based livelihood pattern. The household assets of this community have greatly influenced from the process of adoption of new strategy and modification of traditional occupation. The household with comparatively better access to the capital to pursue livelihood have been adopting the influence of urbanization in their areas more easily than the households who have less access to such assets. As the development and other economic activities change the surrounding environment of a space, the people of a particular space have to change their way of life to adopt with the changing environment.

Research in this community i.e. Patihani shows that historically people had their livelihood from fishing but it is almost declining so they adopted agriculture based activities. Land was a major household asset and crop production (Maize, mustard, paddy, wheat etc) was the means of subsistence. Since, Tharus traditional occupations i.e. fishing, boating, gold panning and collecting forest product have almost been shifted to farm and off-farm activities for their livelihood. However, agriculture even in the past was not sufficient for them rather they had to dependent other activities besides agricultural. For the period in which agriculture was insufficient, they worked to collect forest resources, off farm labor work and or the wage labor in the city. Besides they also worked in the field of different sector for manual work.

But rapid urbanization and globalization pushed them in the transition providing both opportunities and constraints. The household assets have undergone rapid modification. Now they have no option other than modifying of the traditional occupation (Particularly fishing, boating, gold panning) towards commercialization of agriculture or adoption of urban oriented non-agricultural activities. Land fragmentation, change in social institution, regularization in communal resources such as forest and grazing land, can be considered the constant resulted from the urbanization and globalization. Increasing access in urban employment, expansion of the market for their agriculture and handmade productions are the opportunities created by urbanization and globalization. The livelihood diversification and introducing of foreign employment have recently emerged livelihood strategies of the people in the study area.

The livelihood strategies of Majhi, Danuwar and Tharu were similar in past. But some sort of different was there. Due to the proximity to the market the influence of the urbanization is more apparent in Patihani. In the study area most of the households follow the multiple occupations besides agriculture; the role of agriculture activities in their life is substantial. Although a few



households sell their crops, most of them sell the vegetable. They are able to harvest food for some months from their own production.

The last Section of this research has discussed the role and responsibility of the Tharu community in household and community sphere through gender perspective to understand the livelihood of the community in more individual level than the household. The women in general condition do not inherit their parental property with expectation of the case of widow. But they rear animals as their own property and can sell and use in their own accord. The work division in this community is no different than the other caste. Male mostly work outside the household where as female inside the household. Male work as a collector of the household, where female work as a distributors. Regarding the decision-making process, the male takes decisions however female also participate in decision making. Regarding food no discrimination found in this community in terms of male and female. The boys are preferred for better education than the girls but the discrimination were observed in the clothing. The participation of women on communal and rather the ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and heavy load of household\old work deprive from such work. People of this society feel different role of the male and female in the society. The male's role mostly considered the outside work and the source of collecting the resources for the family. However the role is not as different as other caste people. The education status of the female in this community is worse than male. Politically Tharus are found excluded; they are not getting chance even in local bodies.

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