

Exploring the Socio-Cultural Effects of Youth Migration in Rural Areas

¹Pramila Basnet and ²Shambhu Prasad Khatiwada, PhD

¹Lecturer, Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5316-7588>

²Professor, Central Department of Education

Abstract

This study explores the socio-cultural impacts of youth migration on the Tamang community in Dobhan village, Kakani Rural Municipality, Nuwakot district. Migration is the voluntary movement of people to change their residence, often driven by factors such as conflict, persecution, or natural disasters. Guided by conflict theory, this study analyzes migration as a process influenced by structural inequalities, resource struggles, and societal power relations, rather than a personal choice. Using qualitative methods including in-depth interviews and observations with family members of migrant youths' data were collected. The findings reveal that migration has both positive and negative effects on the Tamang community. While migration provides economic benefits, through remittance, it also contributes to family fragmentation, emotional detachment, and erosion of cultural values. The community is experiencing new forms of stress and conflicts because of these socio-cultural power relationships. This study further concludes that many Tamang youths are seeking migration in response to climate change, land degradation, limited local employment opportunities and better income sources. These sources are complemented by foreign employment, urban migration, and livelihood diversifications. In this context, this study explores the intricate nature of youth migration in rural areas, emphasizing the need for local coordinated efforts for opportunity creation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Keywords: Youth migration, sociocultural erosion, structural inequalities, resource struggles, better opportunities, community empowerment

Introduction

Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another to change their residence. Migration can be voluntary in search of better opportunities, or it can be driven by conflict, persecution or natural disasters can trigger migration. According to the IOM (2019), migration is defined as “any movement of individuals or groups of people, whether across international borders or within states, of any kind, for any period, in any structure, or for any reason.” Youth migration is specifically defined by the United Nations as the movement of people between the ages of 15 to 24 who migrate for reasons such as better education, employment, and security or living conditions. Often motivated by the need for a better life, work and education, young people form a significant part of international migrants (UNDESA, 2020).

Research indicates that the absence of young individuals leads to a decrease in community support, thereby reducing social capital (Vullnetari & King, 2009). Globalization has led to increased youth migration for better opportunities and education, resulting in positive benefits but also negative effects like cultural identity loss of festivals, language, and social values (Levitt, 1998). For example, young people returning from abroad can bring new technologies, knowledge, and entrepreneurial skills to their communities, which can significantly contribute to local development (UNDP, 2019). Youth migration also influences social structures, cultural identity, and economic conditions, especially in rural areas, causing weakened family ties, loss of traditional culture, and demographic imbalances (Yunus et al., 2025). Nepal has seen a substantial increase in youth migration in recent years, driven primarily by the desire for employment and education (Bhattarai, 2024). The number of youths migrating from rural to urban and abroad has increased in various communities like Tamang. The Tamang community is experiencing rapid socio-economic and cultural changes due to the rapid migration of youth, influenced by both internal and external migrations (Sapkota et al., 2024).

The Tamang, an indigenous ethnic group, has historically resided in hilly regions in Nepal. They possess unique sociocultural, linguistic, and economic characteristics that adapt to their specific geographical location. The traditional adaptive strategies of Tamang communities include shifting cultivation on terraced fields, reliance on communal labor exchange (*parma*), livestock herding, use of forest resources for subsistence, and seasonal migration for wage labor to cope with the harsh mountain environment and limited agricultural yields (Bomzon & Bharucha, 2022). However, Tamang youths are seeking migration from hilly regions due to the decline in agricultural productivity because of climate change and land degradation, which limits local employment opportunities. This condition compels them to pursue better income

opportunities through foreign employment or urban migration (Arslan et al., 2021). The youth outmigration of Tamang communities is causing socio-cultural changes, challenging their cultural heritage and communal way of life.

Thus, youth migration in Nepal is both a challenge and an opportunity, emerging as a major socio-economic phenomenon that reshapes demographic patterns, drives economic change, and redefines socio-cultural norms (Joshi & Dahal, 2024). This trend is especially evident in marginalized and indigenous groups, such as the Tamang community, where the erosion of traditional livelihoods pushes young people to seek better prospects elsewhere (Sapkota et al., 2023). For the Tamang, migration has altered family structures, gender roles, and intergenerational relations (Lama, 2022), while also contributing to broader social transformations (Levitt, 1998) and influencing cultural identity (Dhakal, 2023).

While migration studies in Nepal have broadly addressed economic and cultural transformations, there is a lack of in-depth, context-specific analysis on how Tamang youth migration in areas like Dobhan, Kakani Rural Municipality, generates internal socio-cultural conflicts—particularly gender roles, cultural practices, economic resource control, and power relations between generations—and how these conflicts are reshaping or disrupting traditional social structures and leading to the emergence of new socio-cultural patterns.

In this context, this study seeks to fill the research gap by critically analyzing how Tamang youth migration from Dobhan, Kakani Rural Municipality, interrupts and reshapes traditional values, customs, and power structures. Migration introduces new ideas, behaviors, and economic statuses that generate conflicts over gender roles, cultural practices, resource control, and intergenerational relations. Ultimately, these dynamics transform the socio-cultural patterns of the community while contributing to a deeper understanding of migration-induced changes in indigenous societies.

Methods and Materials

This study utilizes Karl Marx's conflict theory as a critical paradigm. The critical paradigm posits that social reality is influenced by power dynamics, inequalities, and historical patterns. The emphasis is on revealing concealed oppressive structures and empowering marginalized communities. This study promotes social justice and empowerment through dialogue and interactions between researchers and participants, focusing on knowledge co-construction.

This study employs a qualitative case study design. The case study approach provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural implications (Yin, 2009) of Tamang youth migration in the real-life context of Dobhan village. This design helps in understanding individual experiences and the broader social transformations occurring within the Tamang community.

The data for this study are qualitative in nature. Primary data were collected directly from participants through interviews, while secondary data were obtained from relevant literature, reports, and previous studies. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select participants who could provide valuable and pertinent insights into the research objectives. In total, seven family members were chosen, each belonging to households with young members who had migrated for education or employment. These participants, with direct or familial migration experiences, were considered suitable informants for the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture insights into the experiences, perspectives, and meanings of youth migration, particularly its influence on family relationships, cultural practices, and social identity. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and was conducted with participants' informed consent. Data were documented through audio recordings and supplemented with detailed field notes.

This study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis, transcribed interviews, reviewed field notes, and coded data to align with research questions and conflict theory concepts. Codes were analyzed to identify potential themes, which were refined using theoretical framework and empirical evidence, to capture individual experiences and collective socio-cultural transformations within the Tamang community. The study followed ethical research principles, obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

Results and Discussion

Social and cultural influences of migration

Migration studies in Nepal often emphasize economic gains and cultural changes but tend to overlook internal socio-cultural conflicts within indigenous communities. This study shows that Tamang youth migration from Dobhan, Kakani Rural Municipality, has accelerated social transformations. The inflow of remittances and exposure to new ideas have significantly influenced gender dynamics by expanding women's responsibilities, enhancing decision-making power, and challenging traditional male authority. Migrant

households are increasingly adopting individualistic lifestyles, leading to a decline in cultural practices such as rituals and communal labor. Furthermore, the distribution of economic resources has shifted toward returning migrants and their immediate families, thereby disrupting traditional patterns of collective ownership.

The Tamang participants reported that our community is experiencing a transformation due to the introduction of modern values by youth migration, which challenges our traditional norms. Generation gap is escalating as younger migrants bring new ideas, often conflicting with elder generations' values of communal harmony, tradition, and adherence to customs. Elders, who once held unquestioned authority in family and community decision-making, are losing their influence as youth adopt new perspectives influenced by global exposure. The tensions between traditional and modern customs have resulted in hybrid cultural practices, such as festivals celebrated with reduced communal participation and altered expression forms. Respect for elders is culturally valued, but decision-making now prioritizes younger members with new skills or education, controlling remittance income.

Participants reported that the shift in their power relations is causing a re-evaluation of community identities. For example, younger generations view themselves as part of a global society, leading to internal conflicts about belonging and cultural pride. The negotiation of values is transforming the social fabric, weakening traditional structures and enabling the emergence of new socio-cultural patterns. The community is grappling with the delicate balance between preserving its heritage and navigating the pressures of modernization.

Family fragmentation and evolving relationship dynamics

In this study, narratives of Tamang participants reveal that while youth migration offers economic opportunities, it also profoundly affects the emotional well-being of families. The findings indicate that long-term separations, mismanagement of remittances, and shifting household responsibilities have eroded trust and intimacy within traditional family life. Participants frequently described experiences of emotional distance, weakening marital ties, and the gradual disintegration of the family unit.

Case 1 unambiguously summarized this influence, stating, "Foreign employment has broken up the family, the family has broken down." Similarly, Case 2 painted a troubling picture: "The family has broken down, and the money sent is not properly used, and it is often seen in our village that people enjoy themselves." For Case 3, early separation due to migration resulted in severe marital stress: "Marital relationships have

been destroyed because of separation at a young age.” Case 4 noted that “family love and affection will also decrease after living far away,” while Case 5 suffered, “family sweet relationships are no longer there.”

In these cases, it can be said that migration disrupts not only economic roles but also reshapes emotional connections and power relations within families, according to participants narratives. Misuse of remittances, lack of emotional support, and lack of understanding between separated partners can lead to suspicion, mistrust, and even extramarital relationships. Through the participants’ voices, migration's economic benefits often come with significant social costs, such as family foundation damage, financial conflicts, emotional needs, and community crises.

Problems in children: Emotional wounds and behavioral risks

Participant narratives reveal that children are among the most vulnerable victims of youth migration in the Tamang community. The absence of parents creates an emotional gap, depriving children of the love, care, and guidance essential for healthy development. This lack of parental support fosters psychological insecurities, feelings of loneliness, and diminished self-confidence."

Cases 1 and 3 emotionally described, “There is a situation where children are left behind; even though they have parents, they are like orphans, and they do not receive the love of their parents.”

Emotional neglect has far-reaching consequences beyond psychological distress. Case 3 highlights the detrimental effects of parental discipline on children, including early alcohol and smoking addiction, gambling, poor academic performance, and depression. These issues not only pose a threat to their present well-being but also jeopardize their future prospects. The situation is a manifestation of intergenerational conflict, where parental financial decisions can unintentionally harm their children's emotional and social development.

Cultural erosion and identity crisis: Struggles between traditional and modernity

The study reveals that youth migration is accelerating cultural erosion and escalating an identity crisis within the Tamang community. Younger generations' migration to cities or abroad weakens their connection to traditional language, customs, and cultural practices, posing a threat to communal identity. Participants expressed significant concern over this transformation. Case 2 and Case 3 noted that “their language and culture are starting to weaken,” emphasizing the gradual loss of cultural pride. The

erosion is particularly noticeable among children from migrant families who often feel disconnected from their roots.

Case 3 shared, “Children living in the city market are shy to speak the Tamang language; they do not even understand what is being said.” Traditional dress, once a symbol of cultural pride, is now rarely worn, as highlighted: “Tamang dress has been stopped being worn except for Lhosar. How much has it disappeared?” More alarmingly, a profound sense of shame and confusion about identity was captured in the statement, “Since when have I become a Tamang, this is my language, and even my home country is a place of shame?”

Globalization and modernity are causing cultural conflict and weakening collective consciousness, as evidenced by the voices expressing this impact on local traditions. Language loss, ritual decline, and fading cultural symbols signify a rupture in historical continuity and social cohesion, not just practice changes. The erosion of a community's identity is posing a challenge to its self-esteem and preservation of its distinctive cultural heritage amid rapid socio-economic changes.

Changing gender roles: Burdens and empowerment in transition

The Tamang community has experienced an important shift in gender dynamics due to the migration of male youth, empowering women while also imposing increased responsibilities on them. Due to the absence of men, women are now tasked with assuming traditionally male-dominated roles such as agricultural labor and community decision-making. The shift in women's role and visibility in social activities has resulted in increased physical and emotional strain due to their full domestic responsibilities.

Case 6 vividly captured this reality, stating, “We have to do all the housework ourselves; we have to gather together for social activities, and important advice and decisions are often made by the young men.” This reflects a paradox where women’s participation in broader social spheres grows, but the patriarchal expectation of domestic responsibility remains unchanged.

The changes from a dialectical perspective reveal a conflict between empowerment and exploitation. Migration challenges traditional gender roles, allowing women to exercise authority, but also reinforces their double workload, fostering a new form of gendered conflict. Women's migration experiences are marked by both the promise of transformation and the persistence of structural inequalities.

Increase in social deviance: Weakening values and rising tensions

The study reveals that while migration generates economic opportunities, it has also contributed to social dislocation and the rise of deviant behaviors within the Tamang community. The absence of family members, misuse of remittances, and the weakening of traditional social control mechanisms have fostered conditions conducive to social tensions and destructive behaviors. Participant narratives highlight alarming manifestations of migration-induced instability.

Case 1 pointed to an increase in mental health issues, stating that “increased suicide rates” are becoming a frightening reality, likely driven by family breakdowns, loneliness, and financial stress. Case 2 observed that the inflow of remittances often leads to reckless spending, saying, “enjoying the pleasures of life without properly utilizing the money sent.” This mismanagement of money reflects how the absence of proper guidance and social oversight can encourage harmful behaviors. Furthermore, Case 3 emphasized the moral strain migration places on relationships: “There is no house in any neighborhood where two unmarried people have not married. The marriage relationship has been destroyed because of the separation at a young age.” Long-term separations have fueled extramarital affairs, divorces, and disruptions to children’s well-being.

These narratives suggest that migration is causing the erosion of traditional values and weakening community cohesion. Migration's rapid social changes, lacking robust cultural or social frameworks to regulate behavior, have heightened the likelihood of deviance. Migration not only alters economic conditions but also poses a challenge to the moral and social stability of the Tamang community.

Development of consumerist culture and decline in traditional values

Participant narratives indicate that youth migration has weakened the Tamang community's traditional values of hard work, frugality, and collective responsibility. The influx of remittances and the influence of technology have shifted aspirations toward material comfort, luxury, and emulation of global lifestyles. Dialectical theory highlights the conflict between the community's traditional values of labor and simplicity and the emerging values of consumerism and individualism driven by globalization.

Participant voices clearly articulate this change. Case 3 observed, “If you have a little money, no one wants to suffer in the village,” reflecting how easy access to money discourages traditional hard work. Case 5 criticized the growing dependence on modern technology, stating, “Today’s young generation feels that this mobile phone has also spoiled modern technology, children are dependent on it 24 hours a day, disobeying

their mothers, and the idea of becoming rich abroad is like a dream come true.” He added, “With foreign money, everyone has lost their ability to produce energy.”

These reflections reveal that remittances and technology have influenced behaviors, leading to a mindset of quick wealth, dependency, and a reduced work ethic. The Tamang community is facing a significant cultural conflict as individualistic desires and consumerist habits overshadow traditional values of discipline, cooperation, and self-reliance. This transformation is not just about lifestyle changes; it also raises questions about the community's future productive capacity, and the community is assessing its capacity to maintain its cultural identity amidst the increasing influence of global consumer culture.

Decline in social solidarity and community life

This study indicates that youth migration has implicitly affected the social cohesion and collective life of the Tamang community. Traditionally, communal festivals, rituals, and mutual support networks played a vital role in fostering social connections and transmitting cultural knowledge. The outflow of youth has disrupted social and emotional interactions, leaving villages feeling hollow. The absence of active young members has reduced participation in communal events and weakened the traditional structure of interdependence.

Participant narratives illustrate this reality vividly. Case 3 shared, “The village itself is empty, the mind itself is empty, the festival itself is dull,” capturing the sense of isolation and loss of vibrancy in community life. Case 4 highlighted the collapse of basic social support, stating, “There are no youths who gather in the village when we die,” pointing to the erosion of solidarity during critical life events. Similarly, Case 5 noted, “There are only grandfathers, grandmothers, and mothers in the village,” emphasizing the demographic imbalance where only the elderly and children remain, while the working-age population is absent.

These narratives reveal that demographic shift has not only weakened social networks but also disrupted the transmission of cultural practices and collective decision-making. The erosion of social capital is occurring as economic priorities surpass community obligations. The decrease in solidarity signifies not only reduced participation in communal life but also a broader decline in overall community. These narratives signify a shift in the relationship between individuals and their community, where collective identity and mutual support are being replaced by individual economic pursuits.

Displacement of traditional knowledge and skills

Local narratives reveal that youth migration and reliance on remittances have profoundly affected the traditional knowledge, skills, and production systems within the Tamang community. Younger generations are abandoning traditional occupations such as farming, animal husbandry, and handicrafts in favor of modern lifestyles and foreign income, undermining values of self-reliance and hard work. This trend not only threatens the community's cultural identity but also poses risks to its economic sustainability.

Case 6 emphasized this crisis, stating, "Foreign money has destroyed everyone's vitality and production skills," pointing to how remittances discourage labor and skill development. Similarly, Case 4 raised concerns about the weakening of traditional agriculture, noting the "problem of raising and training farmers." The declining interest in agricultural work has left lands uncultivated, reduced food production, and heightened dependence on external markets.

The economic transformation reflects a clash between the traditional agricultural system and the modern remittance-driven model. Traditional knowledge, including the use of local seeds, organic fertilizers, and indigenous tools, is being replaced by external inputs and technologies as it loses relevance. The erosion of these skills not only undermines the community's cultural heritage but also increases dependence on external markets, heightening vulnerability to economic uncertainties and compromising long-standing self-reliance. Consequently, the community faces a delicate balance between preserving its heritage and adapting to the pressures of modernization.

Lack of contribution to rural development and urban-centric investment

This study reveals that despite substantial remittances from youth migration, these funds have not significantly contributed to the development of rural areas in the Tamang community. Most earnings are directed toward urban-centered investments, such as building houses, purchasing land, and funding education in cities, rather than supporting local infrastructure or businesses in villages. This trend is widening the gap between rural and urban areas, thereby exacerbating regional inequality.

Participant voices highlight this issue clearly. Case 2 stated, "After earning 2–4 paisa abroad, those who do not want to live in the village have to go to the city, which has not contributed much to the development of the village." Similarly, Case 6 noted, "Those who are out of the house for two or four people do not invest in the village at all, but instead go to the city market to invest there." These statements reflect how remittances,

rather than fostering local growth, are driving urban migration and neglect of rural development.

These narratives suggest a potential conflict between rural and urban development priorities. Cities offer numerous amenities, opportunities, and modern lifestyles, encouraging migrants to channel their investments away from their villages. While rural areas remain underdeveloped, urban centers experience increased population pressure. The use of remittances for urban consumption and real estate perpetuates a cycle in which rural communities lag in sustainable development, rather than reducing inequality.

Conclusion

This study explored youth migration in the Tamang community, highlighting both the positive economic benefits of remittances and the negative socio-cultural disruptions it generates. The findings reveal that migration has weakened traditional family structures, leading to family fragmentation, emotional distance, and strained marital relationships. Children deprived of parental care often face psychological insecurities, behavioral problems, and greater vulnerability to addiction, reflecting intergenerational impacts. Moreover, migration has accelerated the erosion of language, customs, and cultural identity, contributing to an identity crisis among younger generations. Additionally, youth migration has transformed gender roles, fostered social deviance and cultivated new consumerist values, displaced traditional knowledge and production systems, reinforced urban-rural inequality, weakened community cohesion, and exemplified the resource inequalities and power imbalances highlighted by conflict theory. These changes have weakened social solidarity, reduced participation in communal activities, and disrupted cultural continuity. From a conflict theory perspective, these dynamics illustrate how migration reflects resource inequalities, power imbalances, and generates new social and cultural conflicts, within the community.

Overall, this study concludes that although youth migration provides important economic benefits but also imposes significant social costs, including family breakdown, cultural erosion, loss of traditional skills, and widening development disparities. These findings underscore the need for policies and community initiatives that address conflicts, safeguard cultural heritage, strengthen rural development, and promote socio-cultural sustainability in the Tamang community. Furthermore, youth migration from Dobhan reflects not only economic opportunities but also underlying structural inequalities, power imbalances, and ongoing socio-economic marginalization.

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