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SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF ETHNICITY BASED BUSINESS IN BAGLUNG, NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is a sociological and historical process that evolves based on economic, social, and political factors. This paper aims to analyze the socio-economic impact of ethnicity-based businesses on the local economy based on these two questions what are the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of caste-based business owners? How do ethnicity-based businesses impact social behavior and the economic outlook of Baglung? This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative method, descriptive and explanatory research design. Purposive sampling is used to select 48 businesses and respondents. Face-to-face interviews were conducted as the data collection method to gather necessary information from business owners and understand the causes contributing to their operations in the current market of Baglung Bazar based on caste-based factors. This research found that most businesses creatures to customers from Brahmin, Chhettri, or Magar backgrounds, with a moderate number of customers from other castes. But Dalits have the highest employment rate (41.7%) compared to other ethnic groups in the businesses. Similarly, daily customer arrival found depending on the price and quality of the products, as well as on ethnic groups, and their demands or desires and correlations found highly significant. This study concluded that there is a diverse range of investments patterns, varying levels of income depending on their investment and sale patterns, ethnicity based business with relatively low annual profitability and lower satisfaction, particularly in government support, access to resources, and future business opportunities. This research will be beneficial for academics, researchers, and policymakers.

Keywords: Business, ethnicity, source of funds, socio-economic transformation, Baglung

INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity is a sociological and historical process that involves both continuity and change in the various facets of ethnic identity among the various ethnic groupings. The economic, social and political aspects of history influence the definition, creation and reconfiguration of ethnic identity in modern society. The concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity is not constant and transform over the time based on the social and political climate of the country. Its identity changes according to the social and political context of modern civilization (Acharya, 2020). After 1990, ethnic activism became more popular as an individuals and groups within the larger ethnic movement like the Paharis, affirmed their identity (Acharya, 2021). In this regard, the ethnicity plays role in Nepal's political and social dynamics rather than the history of ethnically based enterprises (Upadhya, 2014). Various factors like education, generation, local population, economic status, employment opportunities, geography and cultural variations influence the establishment of ethnic firms or businesses.

Immigration, economic restructuring and favorable opportunity structures have contributed to the raise in ethnic entrepreneurship in Western societies (Volery, 2007). The history of ethnic Chinese business in Asia shows the importance of family enterprises, business conglomerates and cultural factors like *guanxi* and *xinyong* in their success (Yen, 2013). Similarly, ethnic businesses in various counties, including Turkish Cypriot enterprises in London and Jewish businesses in the UK have employed diverse strategies for economic survival (Miyamoto *et al.*, 2010). Lyer & Shapiro (1999) disclose that business pattern and marketing strategies used by ethnic entrepreneurial networks make significant contribution to local, national and global economies, connecting small business, globalization and the nation state in innovative ways.

Pandit (2012) reveals that most of the business activities in Nepal are controlled by the hill migrants around Chitwan National Park, while the Tharu, an indigenous and ethnic group in the Terai region of Nepal, have been marginalized. Ethnic based entrepreneurship is impacted by social, family and friendship networks, community involvement, and other cultural factors which play crucial roles in business development (Jan, 2017). The growth of these types of businesses in Western societies are determined by immigration, economic restructuring and changing structure of the economy (Volery, 2007). Due to the growth of local markets in the rural areas, online business, globalization marketing and transportation as well as the lack of business caused by federalism customers are less in Baglung (Panta, 16 March, 2024). Similarly, the Batkhela bazaar in Pakistan has led

to both economic growth and political reforms through the utilization of social media by business owners (Jan, 2017). Another study demonstrates how culture, community, and ethnic context mediate the nature, size and function of ethnic based businesses (Kraybill *et al.*, 2010).

Nepal's business activities are dominated by hill migrants; indigenous groups are marginalized. Ethnic-based entrepreneurship is influenced by social, family, and cultural factors. Growth in Western societies is influenced by immigration, economic restructuring, and changing economic structures. Rural markets, online business, globalization marketing and transportation as well as the lack of business caused by federalism customers are less in Baglung (Panta, 16 March, 2024). Similarly, the Batkhela bazaar in Pakistan has led to both economic growth and political reforms through the utilization of social media by business owners (Jan, 2017). Another study demonstrates how culture, community, and ethnic context mediate the nature, size and function of ethnic based businesses (Kraybill *et al.*, 2010).

Nepal's business activities are dominated by hill migrants, and indigenous groups are marginalized. Ethnic-based entrepreneurship is influenced by social, family, and cultural factors. Growth in Western societies is influenced by immigration, economic restructuring, and changing economic structures. Rural markets, online business and globalization impact on local markets. But nobody has studied this issue in Baglung yet. Thus, this study focuses on the persistent influence of caste and ethnicity on business opportunities and economic development in Nepal, suggesting the need for targeted policies to address these disparities and promote inclusive growth.

Caste-based businesses are linked to social classes and are influenced by factors like political and legal ownership, age, education, and language. Dalits, who are oppressed in religion, culture, society, and economy, can adapt to new environments by changing their traditional occupations. The researcher focuses on the occupations of different castes in Baglung, arguing that these groups have developed new economic strategies to cope with different ecological settings. Investigating the relationship between giving up traditional careers and acclimating to new ones is vital for addressing disparities and promoting inclusive growth.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Cultural activities were much influenced by local environmental conditions. Culture is the result of the adaptive strategy of man in a particular environment which helps to bring drastic changes in society (White, 1988). The Dalits are defined as those castes of people in Nepal who are categorized as untouchables in society (Bishowkarma, 2005). There are

different caste groups who change their traditional occupation and adapt new occupations to cope with a new environment. In this sense, different groups of people respond differently to different socio-cultural and economic settings (Chhetri, 1990). Tailoring may become a national industry. The preservation of tailoring and playing *Panche Baja* culture, efforts could be exerted through combined efforts from the state as well as NGO/INGO and the elites (Ojha, 2003).

Stepczak (2023) revealed that social entrepreneurship in Nepal are disproportionately represented by Brahmins and Chhetris ethnic groups. The readymade garment business demonstrates how disparate ethnic groups respond to economic downturns differently based on their historical legacies and cultural capital (Shakya, 2008). Similarly, regarding the issue, Rahut *et al.* (2022) point that utilization of clean cooking energy is linked to socio-economic stratification on the basis of ethnicity and caste in Nepal.

Although various scholars have examined the issue of ethnicity-based businesses and their impact in different locations, no one has specifically focused on these issues. Similarly, analyzing existing literature suggests that ethnicity-based businesses have an impact, but further academic research in Baglung is lacking in areas such as adaptation, culture, caste, the nature of the business, customer arrival, and customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study focus to address these research questions: What are the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of caste-based business owners? How do ethnicity-based businesses impact social behavior and the economic outlook of Baglung? To fulfil the gaps of above questions, this study focused to examine the types of ethnicity-based businesses in Baglung and to analyze the socio-economic impact of ethnicity-based businesses on the local economy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative method, descriptive and explanatory research design. Primary data from surveys, observations and interviews utilizing questionnaires was gathered from the business owners. Sampling involved selecting a representative sample of various community members in Baglung, specifically focusing on the owners of core area businesses of Baglung Municipality. For the conduction of this research work, 48 business owner of caste based business were selected randomly. Secondary data from a various book, journals, profile of concerned organizations were collected. Data analysis was conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively, with the results presented using tables to understand and interpret the collected data effectively. For this, latest version of SPSS software was applied.

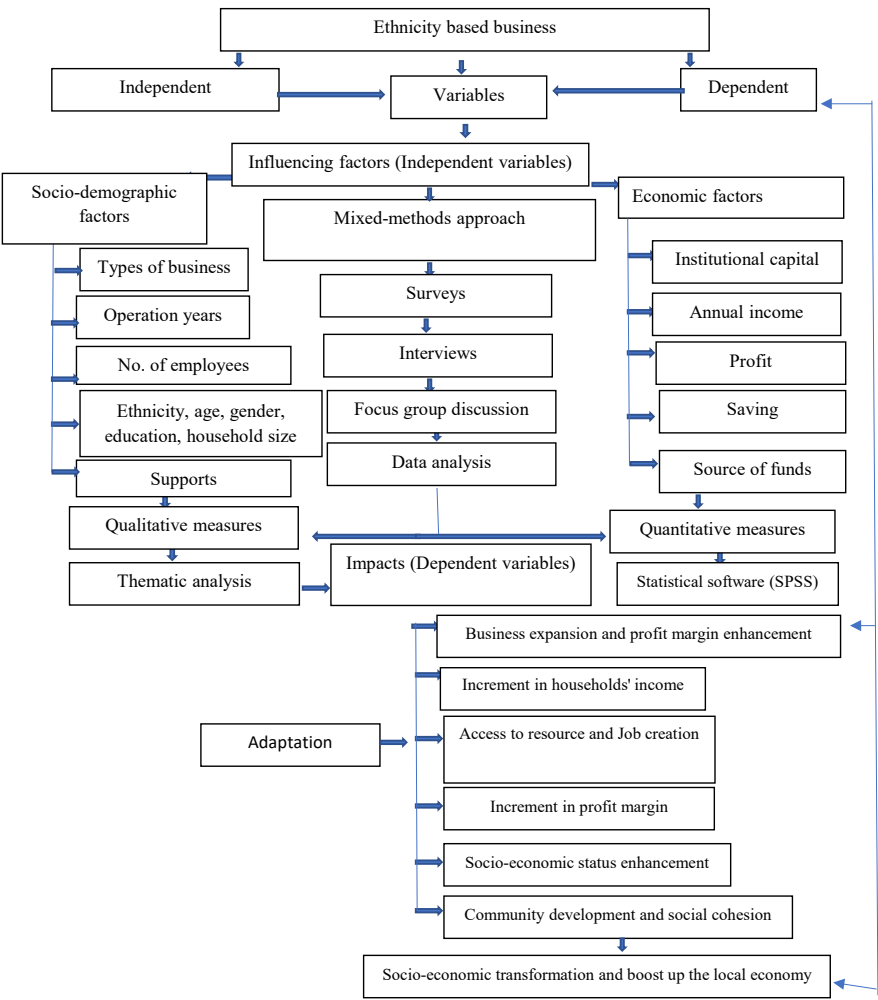
STUDY AREA

This research work is confined to Baglung Municipality. Out of the four municipalities of Baglung District, Baglung Municipality was chosen as the study area purposively. It is situated in the Western part of the district, Gandaki Province of Nepal. Baglung Municipality was established in 1997 (Magh 18, 2053 BS) as a local government. The headquarters of this municipality is located in Baglung bazar. Baglung is an urban municipality and also known as *Nagarpalika* in the Nepali Language. The total area of Baglung Municipality is 98.01 Km² (37.84 Sq. meters), and the total population of the municipality according to the Nepal's population census (2021) is 57,823 with 15,182 households. The population density of this municipality is 589.97. This municipality is divided into 14 wards and situated 3,350 feet above sea level (Silwal, 2024). This is a municipality having a multicultural and multiracial community. The majority of the population belongs to ethnic communities of Brahmin, Chhetri, Chhantyal, Magar, and Dalits. Smaller groups of Gurung, Thakali, and Newar also live in the area. The average literacy rate of this municipality is 85%. Owing to the headquarters of this district, this municipality was selected for this study (NSO, 2021). Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam are practiced in the area. In Dhorpatan area of this district, there is also a small group of Tibetan refugees.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research explores (Figure: 1) the relationship between ethnicity-based businesses and socio-demographic and economic factors. Factors like business types, years of operation, employee numbers, and demographic characteristics are considered as independent variables. Economic factors like institutional capital, annual income, profit margins, savings, and source of funds are also considered. A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze these factors, focusing on qualitative and quantitative measures, and is assessed using thematic analysis and statistical software (SPSS). The findings contribute to community development, social cohesion, socio-economic transformation, and local economy upliftment. The concept of adaptation is introduced to drive economic and social benefits for different ethnic groups.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Sources: Silwal, 2024.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Businesses can operate in a variety of sectors including manufacturing, retail, technology, finance and healthcare, and range in size from small local businesses to multinational corporations. Both for profit and non-profit organizations can benefit from applying the same business principles, despite possible differences in their main goals and

funding models. This study uses micro data analysis of the central regions of Baglung municipality to present the state of ethnicity-based businesses. The following tables show the study findings:

Table 1

Demographic and Social Factors of the Sample Area (N=48)

Factors	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	26	54.2
	Female	22	45.8
Age	Age 20-30 years	3	6.3
	Age 30-40 years	9	18.8
	Age 40-50	14	29.2
	Age 50-60	12	25.0
	Age 60 and above years	10	20.8
Education	Never been to school	10	20.8
	Primary school	15	31.3
	Secondary school	18	37.5
	Technical education	2	4.2
	University education	3	6.3
Ethnicity	Brahmin/chhetri	26	54.2
	Janjati	9	18.8
	Dalit	11	22.9
	Madhesi	2	4.2
	Brahmin/chhetri	13	27.1
Employed by ethnicity	Janjati	13	27.1
	Dalit	20	41.7
	Madhesi	1	2.1
	Others	1	2.1

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

Gender, Age, Education Level, Ethnicity and Number of Employed

The social and demographic characteristics of the sample area are shown in Table 1. The data indicates that a slight majority of men (54.2%) are engaged in business-related activities in Baglung. The age range of 29.2 percent comprises business owners who are between 40 and 50 years old. Owner's educational backgrounds differ 37.5% have a secondary education, 31.3 percent have a primary education and 20.8 percent have never attended school. Dalits (22 %) and Janjatis (18.8 %) are the next largest ethnic groups among owners with the majority (54.2 %) being

Brahmin/Chhetri. Collectively the findings indicate that the sample areas population is diverse in terms of racial backgrounds, educational attainment and careers. When examining employment by ethnic group Brahmin/Chhetri and Janjati groups come in second and third respectively at 27.1 percent, while Dalits have the highest employment rate at 41.7 percent because of education and awareness level.

Table 2

Nature of Business (N=48)

Types of business	Frequency	Percent
Hotel	3	6.3
Retailed shop	6	12.5
Butcher shop	3	6.3
Shoes shop	1	2.1
Department store	2	4.2
Cosmetic shop	2	4.2
Jewelry	3	6.3
Fancy	7	14.6
Tailor	6	12.5
Photo studio	1	2.1
Poultry firm	1	2.1
Fast food	1	2.1
Fruits shop	2	4.2
Hardware	6	12.5
Pharmacy	1	2.1
Blacksmithing	3	6.3

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

A variety of companies are shown in Table 2. Hotels, retail stores, butcher shops, pharmacies, jewelry stores, fancy shops, shoe shops, photo studios, fast food restaurants, fruit shops, hardware stores, and blacksmithing are the most common business types in Baglung. At 14% fancy stores account for the largest percentage followed by hardware stores, retail stores and tailors at 12.5 percent apiece. 6.3% of the sample is comprised of hotels meat markets, jewelry stores and blacksmith shops. Similarly, 4.2 percent is made up of department stores, fruit stores and cosmetic shops. In the research area shoe stores, photo studios, fast food restaurants and pharmacies are uncommon. Together they make up only 22.1 percent of all the businesses. Overall, it is clear from the observations that people running businesses come from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds and places. Diverse businesses some of which reflected their cultural beliefs

and traditions were operated by people of the same ethnicities. For several decades Newars have been recognized in the research area for their abundant business as stated by the proprietors.

Table 3

Daily Customer Arrival in the Business (N=48)

No. of customers	Frequency	Percent
1-10	12	25.0
10-20	9	18.8
20-30	11	22.9
30-40	14	29.2
50 and Above	2	4.2

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

Daily Customer Arrivals

Table 3 depicts the daily customer arrivals at businesses in Baglung. Customer arrivals in the study area vary significantly. Of the total businesses observed, 29.2% of shops have 30-40 customers arriving daily, followed by 2-10 customers in 25% of shops, 20-30 customers in 22.9% of shops, 10-20 customers in 18.8% of shops, and 50 or more in 4.2% of shops in the study area. According to respondents, daily customer arrivals depend on the price and quality of the products, as well as on ethnic groups, and their demands or desires.

Table 4

Paired Sample Test (N=48)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	P-value
Daily consumer arrival and Ethnicity	2.69	1.257	3.583	0.000
Daily consumer arrival and Products, Price and quality	2.69	1.257	51.306	0.000
Investment and Annual income, profit, business types	20.5833	2.49965	13.603	0.000
	3.02	1.618		
	12.2500	5.24911		

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

There are strong correlations between the variables under comparison according to the results shown in Table 4. Both daily customer arrival and product-related variables like price and quality ($t = 51.306$

p-value = 0. 000) and ethnicity (t = 3. 583 p-value = 0. 000) showed a strong and statistically significant correlation. Additionally, there is a direct and substantial positive correlation (t = 13. 603 p-value = 0. 000) between investment levels and business outcomes like annual income, profit and business types. These correlations are highly significant and not the result of chance as indicated by the low p-values (0. 000).

Table 5

Source of Funds, Patterns of Investment and Annual Income (N=48)

Source of funds, investment and income (In Rs.)	Frequency	Percent
Sources		
Own sources	10	20.8
Banks	19	39.6
Microfinance institutions	8	16.7
Cooperatives	10	20.8
Others	1	2.1
Investment		
Up to 1 Lakhs	6	12.5
1-5 Lakhs	18	37.5
5-10 Lakhs	11	22.9
10-20 Lakhs	2	4.2
20-50 Lakhs	4	8.3
Up to 1 Crore	7	14.6
Annual income		
Upto 2 lakhs	10	20.8
2-5 lakhs	22	45.8
5-8 lakhs	5	10.4
8-10 lakhs	10	20.8
10-20 lakhs	1	2.1

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

Source of Funds

The sources of funding for business owners in the study area based on ethnicity are shown in Table 5. Banks are the main source of funding for ethnicity-based businesses. According to the owners' responses, 39. 6% of owners said they depend on banks for funding. Own funding sources and cooperatives are noteworthy as well together they provide 20. 8% of the funding. Furthermore, 16. 7% of owners use money from micro lending organizations. All things considered the findings show that ethnically based businesses in this region are mainly using formal sources of funding especially banks.

Patterns of Investment

Table 5 displays the investment patterns of ethnicity-based businesses in Baglung. The study reveals that the majority of business owners (37.5%) have invested between 1-5 lakhs in their businesses. A significant portion of business owners in this area, 22.9% and 14.6%, have invested 5-10 lakhs and up to one crore, respectively. Additionally, a minority of owners (12.5%) have invested between 10-50 lakhs in their businesses. This variety of investment patterns highlights a diverse range of investments in the study area.

Annual Income

According to the findings presented in the Table 5, of the total, 20.8 percent owners earn up to Rs. two lakhs; 45.8 percent owners earn between 2-5 lakhs; 10.4 percent owners earn between Rs. 5-8 lakhs; 20.8 percent earn between Rs. 8-10 lakhs and 2.1 percent owners earn between Rs. 10-20 lakhs annually. In the study area, different businesses found having varying levels of income, depending on their investment and sales patterns. Business owners with low investment have lower incomes, while those with higher investments have higher incomes.

Table 6

Profit Margin of the Business Owners (N=48)

Income (In RS.)	Frequency	Percent
Up to 1 lakhs	23	47.9
1-2 lakhs	15	31.3
3-5 lakhs	6	12.5
5-10 lakhs	4	8.3

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

Profit Margins

The ethnically based businesses in Baglung are shown in Table 6 with their profit margin scenarios. Only 31.3 percent of the owners make profits between one and two lakhs compared to nearly half (47.9 %) who make up to one lakh. Thirteen to five lakhs of profits are made annually by 29 percent of the owners. Just 8.3% of businesses make profits in the range of five to ten lakhs per year which is regarded as a higher profit margin. All things considered a sizable percentage of these ethnically focused companies have comparatively low yearly profitability.

Table 7

Satisfaction Level of Ethnicity Based Business Owners (N=48)
(Strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neutral- = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5)

Statements	Responses (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
The staffs are friendly.	2.1	14.6	35.4	43.8	4.2
The staffs are knowledgeable about the products and services.	0.0	31.3	22.9	45.8	0.0
The products are according the market demand.	0.0	2.1	41.7	54.2	2.1
The products are of high quality.	0.0	2.1	39.6	56.3	2.1
The products prices are fair and reasonable.	0.0	2.1	39.6	52.1	6.3
The value of money is satisfactory.	0.0	4.2	58.3	37.5	0.0
The business is conveniently located.	0.0	6.3	37.5	54.2	2.1
The business hours are convenient.	0.0	6.3	37.5	50.0	6.3
I am satisfied with my overall experience with this business.	0.0	14.6	35.4	39.6	10.4
I recommend this business to others.	0.0	20.8	35.4	43.8	0.0
I am satisfied with the profitability of the business.	0.0	16.7	27.1	52.1	4.2
My business has been financially successful over the past year.	0.0	10.4	39.6	43.8	6.3
Local government policies are supportive for the business.	2.1	12.5	54.2	31.3	0.0
I have access to the resources and support to run the business.	0.0	6.3	50.0	41.7	2.1
I have access to training and development to improve the business skill.	0.0	16.7	45.8	33.3	4.2
I see opportunities here for the expansion of business in the future.	0.0	8.3	41.7	50.0	0.0
Reliability statistics : Cronbach's Alpha	0.804				

Sources: Field Study, June-August, 2024.

The satisfaction scores of ethnically based business owners in this study show a range of reactions to the issues raised. The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that the companies' employees are amiable and helpful and that the high-quality products it offers satisfy consumer demand. They are unbiased in their responses though when it comes to matters like value for money, location convenience and business hours. According to the study there is also less satisfaction with things like future business opportunities, government support and resource accessibility in the study area. Overall, this study identifies areas that require improvement primarily in the availability of resources and outside support.

Finally, a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.804 indicates strong internal consistency among the tested variables supporting the answers reliability.

Narration on Investment Business Before and After

Having worked in the industry for three years, the owner and operator of SATHI MART finds running the company easy. Her company is among many that have faced difficulties as a result of the COVID-19-induced worldwide economic downturn (Sharma, Manu, Personal Communication, May 26, 2024).

The proprietor and operator of a meat shop has been in business for eight years and despite investing ten lakhs, he has managed to save half of that amount. He supplies Brahmin and Chhettri communities with chicken and buffalo products. His goal is to expand the business and potentially open a new branch in Parbat Kusma while adhering to non-caste discrimination practices (Limbu, Subash Subba, Personal Communication, May 27, 2024).

Due to COVID-19 lockdowns, shortages of inflation and rising gold, the owner of a jewelry store is having difficulties. Because of the significant price increases buyers are hesitant to purchase gold products and most of their customers are middle-class families (Century, Dhana Laxmi, Personal Communication, May 28, 2024).

Sharma does not have a spouse or children so; she cannot transfer her business to children. In summary, Sharma, Limbu and Century are all facing difficulties in their respective business due to the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic crisis.

DISCUSSION

Caste-based businesses are companies and economic ventures that are connected to particular social classes in a community. Owing to social and cultural norms some castes have historically specialized in particular trades professions or industries in areas or nations where caste systems are in place. Business performance that is based on ethnicity is influenced by a number of variables including political and legal ownership age experience education and language. As stated by Sameer (2010). Dalits are oppressed in terms of religion, culture, society and economy. They are divided into various castes and professions (Dahal *et al.*, 2002). It is possible for various caste groups to adjust to new environments by changing their traditional occupations and adopting new ones (Chhetri 1990). We all experience changes on a daily basis.

While a lot of literature has been published about changes, there has not been much focus on occupational changes (Pokharel, 2000). Changes in the environments and livelihoods of the poor and marginalized people are central concerns for those involved in development programs in Nepal (Chhetri, 2006). Based on these arguments, the researcher has attempted to raise the issue of change, focusing particularly on the occupations of different castes in Baglung. It is argued that various caste groups in Baglung have developed new economic strategies to sustain and cope with different ecological settings. Individuals may gradually leave their traditional caste-based careers behind and pursue new ones. Investigating the relationship between giving up traditional careers and acclimating to new ones in their environment is therefore vital. According to these studies caste and ethnicity still influence local economic development and commercial prospects. Future policies to address these disparities and encourage inclusive growth should be more targeted according to this research.

CONCLUSION

Economic operations and ventures that are primarily connected to a particular caste. The traditional business held by different castes have changed in Baglung. Changes are occurring in people's lives and traditional occupations owing to social and cultural norms. Some castes have historically specialized in particular business in a nation, where caste systems are existing. These arguments support the claim that different caste groups of Baglung have evolved in new economic tactics to adapt diverse ecological environments. The study has concluded a diverse range of investment patterns, varying levels of income depending on their investment and sale patterns, ethnicity based business with relatively low annual profitability and lower satisfaction, particularly in government support, access to resources, and future business opportunities. They might be gradually adjusting to new occupations and quitting their traditional caste-based ones. The relationship between abandoning conventional business and adjusting to new ones in their surroundings to be thoroughly investigated. Results show that most businesses cater to Brahmin, Chhetri, or Magar customers, with Dalits having the highest employment rate (41.7%). Ethnicity-based businesses have low annual profitability and lower satisfaction, particularly in government support, access to resources, and future business opportunities. However, there are competitive advantages for businesses belonging to specific castes.

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ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR THE RESEARCH

We declare that this research work has been conducted ethically.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with any institutions and individuals.

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