

Socio-Demography of Tamang Community in Nepal.

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Abstract

Tamang is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nepal. They live scattered all around the country, and they live in the hilly region of the country. This paper highlights the caste, culture and demographic status of the Tamang people of Nepal. This study is based on secondary information which has obtained from the published literature. Tamangs have a rich culture, tradition and religion. They are followers of Bon and Buddhism. Farming is a major source of income. Most of them are dependent on agricultural work. Tamang is socially, economically and educationally back warded ethnic group of the country. The illiteracy rate is still higher than other castes. Also, they have a high rate of school dropouts because of their poor economic family background and poor academic progress. Half of the Tamang children have to work in addition to attending schools; they do not play a significant role to bring change in their social and economic status. They are rich in their language, culture, arts and skill. Tamang's various rites, rituals and skills of painting attract foreigners. Tamang community is socially, economically and educationally back warded. They should be addressed by the considered agency from exploitation and backwards community.

Key Words: Caste, Culture, Economic, Social, Tamang

Introduction

Tamang is one of the major ethnic groups of Nepal. According to the 2011 census, the total population of Tamang is 1539830 which accounted for 5.81 per cent of the total population of Nepal. Tamang has a rich and splendid culture which distinguishes them from other ethnolinguistic groups. They have their own traditional and social customs, culture, festivals, religion and language. It is believed that Tamang is the most ancient ethnic group of Nepal. They come from Tibet and lives in the hilly region of Nepal, their mother tongue is Tamang which falls in the Tibeto-Burman language group and is called the Tibeto Burman language. Tamangs are found spread all over the eastern part of Nepal and mostly concentrated in the districts

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of the central region such as Dhading, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Kavre, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchok, and Dolakha. They were the followers of the Bon religion (nature worship) and later on in the 8th century A.D when Buddhism reached Tibet, they started adopting the new religious ethics into their traditional Bompō faith (Moktan, 2014).

The term Tamang was not common in official usage in Nepal until the twentieth century, Tamang in the leadership of Jangba Bir Tamang had requested king Tribhuvan and Prime Minister Bhim Shamsher to separate them from the Bhote caste and identify them as Tamang caste group. In 1932 a government declared that people formerly known as Bhote, Lama, and Murmi were now officially named Tamang (Holomberg, 1989). The Tamang people can be counted as the third largest ethnic group of Nepal. They have their own beliefs regarding Tribes and Clans. Tamangs are divided into two main divisions, the Baratamang and Atharajat. There is no actual difference between the Thars within these tribes and they are the same type in both groups (Gautam & Thapa, 1994).

Tamang is the third-largest indigenous group in Nepal. The discriminatory factors are responsible for a high rate of poverty and illiteracy among indigenous peoples of Nepal. Most Tamangs are lived in a hilly region and they are engaged in the agricultural sector. They do not have sufficient income to fulfil their basic needs. They are highly marginalized and exploited by the state. Due to the discriminatory experienced, they remained poorly educated and many of them have been limited to working as farmers and potters. Still, they are facing illiteracy and extreme poverty.

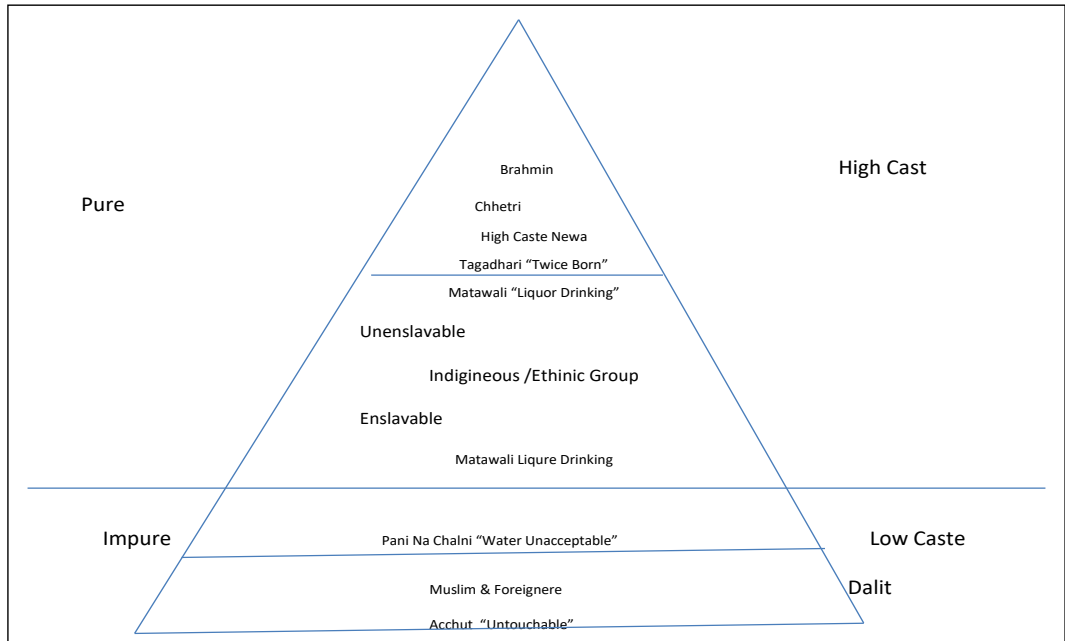
The Tamangs are highly engaged in early marriage. Because of the early marriage, they don't get a chance to focus on their studies as well which highly affected their physical and mental health. Early marriage not only denies girl's education, it often makes them vulnerable to a cycle of discrimination and pulls them to engage in the domestic sphere. They have a high rate of illiteracy and are also faced with extreme poverty. There is a problem of school dropouts due to early marriage and a lack of awareness about education. The school-going children work in different sectors in addition to attending school. Tamangs are one of the backward ethnic groups of Nepal. This paper tries to explore the situation of Tamang in Nepali society in macro level.

The Tamang people, caste and religion

Nepal is a country where different ethnic groups have migrated for two thousand years. These ethnic groups have co-existed with linguistic differences and religious communities. These communities with differences in culture, language and religion established livelihoods in different parts of the country, with separate political units and small chiefdoms and principalities (Dixit, 2002).

The majority of Tamangs are from indigenous nationalities of the hilly region of Nepal. The structure of Nepali society is into a hierarchal segmentation along the line of the Hindu caste system with the ritual claim of superior and inferior as well as pure and impure excluded indigenous peoples, women and Dalits from the national, social, cultural, economic and political life.

Fig. 1: The Caste Hierarchy in Nepal (Muluki Ain 1854)



(Source: World Bank, 2009; ADB, 2010).

After that, the new political system called Panchayat, indigenous peoples and other marginalized peoples were discriminated against by the new form of domination and hegemony by the so-called higher caste. This situation remained the same even after the multi-party democratic system in 1990. And the new constitution of 1991 recognized Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual country that provides to the indigenous people, women and other marginalized peoples from religious, linguistic and political rights and thereby excludes them from mainstream development programs. After the peaceful settlement of the armed conflict, the Maoist participated in the legislature. The participation of Maoist in the legislature increased the percentage of the representation of indigenous peoples, women and other marginalized communities. But this representation does not solve the problem of poverty, health, education and unemployment (Gurung, 2009).

The Hindu caste system categorizes people into four groups (fig. 1): Brahmin is

scholars and priests at the top, Chhetri warriors just below, the Vaishya are merchants and traders, and Sudra are labourers. The Muluki Ain 1854 legally formalized the hierarchal caste system and brought the Janajati into middle-rank status (ADB, 2010).

The CBS identified only 60 ethnic/caste groups in the 1991 census, about 100 ethnic groups in the 2001 census, and the list of ethnic/caste groups was 125 in the 2011 census (Dahal, 2014). The Adibasi/Janajati Uthan Prathistan (2002) provided a list of 59 cultural groups within the Adibasi/Janajati category alone. A Technical Committee formed by Adiabsi/Janajati Pratisthan under the leadership of Om Gurung further updated this list to 81 groups (Om Gurung et al. 2009).

Table 1: Population size and growth rate among 10 major groups in Nepal, 1991 to 2011

Ethnic/Caste groups	Census 1991	Census 2001	Census 2011	Population Growth Rate (2001-2011)
Chhetri	16.1	15.8	16.6	2.04
Brahmin Hill	12.9	12.7	12.2	1.8
Magar	7.2	7.1	7.1	1.52
Tharu	6.5	6.8	6.6	1.25
Tamang	5.8	5.6	5.8	1.84
Newar	5.6	5.6	5	0.59
Kami	5.2	4	4.8	3.46
Musalman	3.5	4.3	4.4	1.83
Yadhav	3.5	4	4	1.64
Rai	2.8	2.8	2.3	-0.24

(Source: CBS 2001 and 2011 Censuses)

The total population of Adiabsi/Janajati groups is 9,267,870 (34.97%) of the total population of Nepal. Of the 50 groups are from the Hill and Mountain districts, another 13 groups are from the Tarai. Among the Hill Adibasi /Janajati, six groups alone (Magar, Tamang, Newar, Rai, Gurung and Limbu) make up (total population: 6,279,441) 86.9% of the total Adiabsi/Janajati population (Dahal, 2014).

Chhetri constituted 16.6% of the total population, an increase of 0.8% from the 2001 Census. The growth rate of Tamang population is 1.84 which placed in third position of the cast / ethnic group. The growth rate of the Newar population between the 2001 and 2011 censuses has remained low. Ten ethnic/ caste groups

almost maintained 69% of the total population of Nepal

There are six districts where the majority of the population are from the Tamang community. Tamangs could not maintain their numerical strength in the Sindhupalchowk district in the 2011 census. Tamang's leading districts in the 2011 census are Kavreplanchowk, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Dhading, Makawanpur, and Sindhuli. Rasuwa district's population is nearly one-third Tamang, Makawanpur district has nearly fifty per cent are Tamang. There are 22% people are Tamangs in Dhading district, it was the highest population in that district by caste population. Tamangs' literacy rate is below the national average. The literacy rate of Tamang is 62.60% which is lower than the national level literacy rate (67%), where 71 % male and 55% female are literate.

Table 2: Majority of Tamang population at district level

District	Population	Percent distribution of Tamang at district level
Kavreplanchowk	129913	34
Nuwakot	118873	42.8
Rasuwa	29782	68.8
Dhading	74239	22.1
Makawanpur	201081	47.8
Sindhuli	79590	26.9
Sindhupalchowk	98570	34.2

(Source: Population Monograph, 2014)

The religious practice of Tamang

The earliest form of religion that the Tamangs practised was the Bon religion which is also known as Shamanism. Tamangs are found in considerable numbers, spread all over the eastern part of Nepal. The Tamangs are one of the oldest tribes in Nepal. Traditionally they were the followers of *the Bon* religion (nature worship) and later on in the 8th century A.D when Buddhism reached Tibet covering the entire Himalayas including the land of Tamangs, they started adopting the new religious ethics into their traditional Bompō faith. The Tamang Buddhist monasteries are painted with images of Lord Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava, Awaloketeswara, Tara and other Buddhist deities on the wall of the monastery. Various Buddhist festivals and ritual ceremonies are conducted in the Gumpas (Moktan, 2014).

Table 3: Distribution of Tamang Population by Religion

Religion	Population	Percent
Hindu	136739	8.88
Buddha	1344139	87.29
Christian	54819	3.56
Bon	107	0.01
Prakriti	327	0.02
Undefined	3699	0.24
Total	1539830	100.00

(Source: *Population Monograph, 2014*)

Tamang is one of the Tibeto- Burman speaking tribes. They were originally called Bhote. The meaning of Tamang is Tamag. Hindu people wrongly pronounced and spoiled the original title of Tamag to Tamang (Lama, 2010). Tamang as a laborious people and the introduction of legal code Muluki Ain in 1854 by PM Jang Bahadur Rana, led to the Tamang being assigned low positions and Tamang is ranked within the category of Masinya Matwali “enslavable alcohol drinker”. In the Muluki Ain, Tamang is subsumed under the category Bhote, which generally refers to Tibeto-Burman speaking groups. After 1932, the Nepal Government recognized the community as Tamang at the request of Sardar Bahadur Jangba Bir Tamang (Officer of the British Empire). Till then they were prohibited to use the term Tamang. Before 1932, the community was never called Tamang in Nepal, the state had called these people Bhote or Murmi (Kukuczka, 2011).

Tamang as mother tongue

The mother tongues enumerated in the census of 2011 (except Kusunda) belong to four language families: Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian. Sino-Tibetan language group covers some ethnic groups such as Gurung, Tamang, Newar and Limbu. According to Census 2011, there are 4584532 (17.30 per cent) people who speak the Sino-Tibetan language. Out of Sino-Tibetan speakers, Tamang speaker has the highest 5.1 per cent population. On the other hand, 33450 (0.12%) people said Tamang is the second language.

The Tamangs are the oldest inhabitants of Nepal who come to Nepal from Tibet in 640 A.D. The main territory of the Tamangs extends in a broad arc to the west, north, and east of the Kathmandu Valley. They never seem to have any share in the government, nor to have been addicted to arms but always followed the profession of agriculture and carried loads for Newars (Frick, 1994).

Tamang is one of the ancient tribes of Nepal. The word Tamang has been derived from the Tibetan word “*Tamag*” which means ‘Ta’ refers to horse and ‘Mag’ refers

to the rider. They are Tibeto-Burman speaking communities of Nepal and maintain a belief that they originally come from Tibet. It is believed that after the Nepal-Tibet War some of the horse-riders of soldiers of King Tsrong Tschong Gampo permanently settled in the Himalayan hills of Nepal who were later recognized as the Tamang nationalities. Tamangs are rich in social and ritual culture and settled in higher altitudes with the compact settlement. Tamangs settle in a compact settlement and bear a strong sense of unity. There are *Ghyangs* (Buddhist Monasteries) in each of the main villages of Tamangs (Bista, 1965).

Social organizations of Tamang

Tamang had a highly organized social body within the village which looked after the social affairs. Their original social organization consists of eight council members. This social structure is laid out on a hierarchal ladder and it is based on the following level of seniority.

Choho - A person who looks into cases of justice and maintains peace, security and wellbeing in the community.

Labon - Labon keeps alive the history of the clan through the worship of various clan deities.

Bonbo - The priest in the community.

Tamba- A person knowing the ancient history of the race.

Lama – Lama carries out all rituals related to the Buddhism.

Mulmi – The leader of village

Nagptha – Tantrick

Douptha – A learned person

The main purpose of traditional social organization was control their social structure. These council are formed in every large Tamang settlement to keep the Tamang society alive from generation to generation (Gautam and Thapa, 1994).

Tamang Caste and culture

The Tamangs are grouped into two great divisions known as Bara Tamangs (Twelve Tribes) and Athara Jaat (Eighteen Clans). The Bara Tamangs are pure Lamas and claim themselves superior to Athara Jaat. It is believed that Bara Thars of Tamangs are of pure blood, while those of Athara Thars are of mixed blood. These types of hierarchal divisions made later were the consequences of Hindu influence (Morris, 1933).

Tamang is rich in culture and tradition, they speak their language, they have their own culture, custom and social structure. They believe in Buddhism, and it is believed that 90 per cent of Tamang people are Buddhist and speak their mother

tongue. Their original script is known as Sambhota, some organizations like Nepal Tamang Ghedung are using a modified version of Sambhota script known as Tamyang (Tamang Ghedung, 2005).

Festivals of Tamang

Sonam Lhochar is one of the important festivals of the Tamang community. Tamangs observe Sonam Lhochhar as their new year. Lho means year and Chahar means new. Another most important event for Buddhist Tamangs is Buddha Jayanti, which happens on Baisakh Purnima. Lord Buddha born on this day, enlightened and gave his first teaching on the four noble truths (Tamang, 2002).

The marriage ceremony of Tamang

In the Tamang community, marriage between the same gotra is considered taboo. In ancient times, the same gotra was considered as offspring of the same parents. They considered as belonging to brother clans. Later their clans got divided according to the place of inhabitation. Cross-cousin marriage is prevalent among the Tamangs, which is to say that matrilineal and patrilineal cross-cousin marriages are generally practised and accepted (Gautam and Thapa, 1994).

Haircutting ceremony (Chhewar)

In the Tamang community, boy children perform Chhewar, a head-shaving ceremony. The child must be three, five or seven years. For sons, their part in family rituals and other practices come to value only after the Chhewar. The maternal uncle plays a key role in the hair cutting ceremony. The date of this ceremony is fixed as per the Buddhist calendar or astrology (Tamang, 2014).

Songs and dances of Tamang

The Tamang people have their traditional songs and dances. The Tamang songs and dances have a distinctive character of their own. Tamang songs composed in Tamang dialect and Tamang Selo reflects the philosophy and ethos of a civilization that can only be considered as ancient and unlike other civilizations it is uniquely singular. Musical instrument of Tamang are Damphu, Tungna and Gonggap. Damphu is one of the most loving musical instruments of the Tamangs. It is an important component of Tamang culture and lifestyle, and it is utilized in every Tamang event (Tamang, 2004).

The social and economic status of Tamang

The poverty rate of Tamang is 28.34 per cent which is higher than other Janajatis. The high poverty rate of Tamang people is due to their concentration in remote areas of hilly regions of Nepal, which suffer from poor infrastructure development and slow economic activities. The Tamangs have the lowest per capita income at

NRs. 33,541. It is below the national average consumption standard. The labour force participation rate is typically higher in rural areas of Nepal, where agricultural work accounts for much of the economic activity than in urban areas. The labour force participation rate of Tamang people is relatively high-more than 80 per cent. The main source of income for Tamang is farming.

The poverty rate of Tamang is 28.34 per cent which is the highest compared to another ethnic groups of Nepal. Also, they have low per capita income at NPRs. 33541. It is below the national average consumption standard. The illiteracy rate of the Tamang population 5 years of age and above and 15 years and over was 37.3 per cent and 49.2 per cent in the 2011 census. And they have a high proportion of their population who has never attained school (44.4%). The school dropout in Tamang students is in the very high majority. About 34 per cent of them are forced to drop out because of poor academic progress and about 7.98 per cent are left school because of marriage. The main source of income for Tamang people is own housing (37.5%) and the second source of income is farming (31.6%) and the third is remittance.

The Tamang women appear more involved in the final decision regarding how to use remittances in a high percentage of households (31.6%) compared to men (12.32%). Selling of household assets is one of the major areas of household economic transactions, household finances are primarily the sphere of male affairs in Nepal. In Tamang households, 21.68 per cent of these decisions are made by women whereas men are (17.66%) (CBS 2011; NLSS 2010/11).

Conclusion

The Tamangs is the indigenous nationalities of Nepal They live in the hilly region of Nepal. Language-wise Tamang people can be counted as the third largest tribe of Nepal. They have their own beliefs regarding their culture, tradition and religion. Tamangs have a rich and splendid culture which distinguishes them from other ethnolinguistic groups. They have a Lama and Bonpo (Tamanng priest) in their villages that fulfil their social and religious functions. Tamang is considered to be a marginalized and exploited ethnic group. Many Tamang people are living in rural areas. They primary depend upon agriculture resources and daily wages. The majority of Tamang has been limited to working as a farmer, mountain trekking, pottering. The severe social problems faced by Tamang people are poverty, powerlessness, lack of capability, unemployment and underemployment and exclusion from decision making processes and institutions. They need constitutional reforms to eliminate social problems and social-economic measures including skill development and income-generating programs to address their poverty. They need education and cultural awareness program. The government and constitution, as

well as policymakers and other agencies, should respect the identity of Tamang and their rights of self-determination in decision-making.

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