



DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THARU COMMUNITY OF SURKHET DISTRICT NEPAL

Social Science

Ms. Saroja Poudel Assistant professor, Department of Nursing, Rapti Academy of Health Sciences, Ghorahi, Dang, Nepal.

Dr. Rajesh Niraula Assistant professor, Department of Radiology, Rapti Academy of Health Sciences, Ghorahi, Dang, Nepal.

ABSTRACT

Background: The Tharu community, an Indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in Nepal's Terai region possesses a rich cultural heritage and unique social structure. In the Surkhet district located in the Karnali province of Nepal, the Tharu population faces significant challenges including social marginalization, economic hardships, and limited access to education and health care. Various developmental interventions have been implemented to address these issues over the past few decades. The intervention includes educational programs, health care initiatives, economic empowerment projects, and infrastructural development. However, the impact of these interventions on the Tharu community in Surkhet remains under-researched. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study assesses the impact of developmental interventions on the Tharu community of the Surkhet district of Nepal. Using stratified random sampling, participants were selected to ensure diverse representation within the Tharu community. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using structured questionnaires which included both closed and open-ended questions to gather quantitative data on socioeconomic indicators. Data were analysed using statistical software where qualitative data were analyzed thematically to understand broader social impact. **Results:** The Tharu community in Surkhet district with a population of 9000 (52% female and 48% male) has experienced significant changes due to developmental interventions and increased interaction with other ethnic groups following the migration of hill people. Traditionally the farmers and livestock rearers. The Tharus have adopted new techniques and methods leading to changes in their lifestyle and social settings. Education level was improved including better transportation and communication, gas facilitated access to improve health care and educational services. Housing has transitioned from traditional mud houses to modern built cement structures. Agricultural practices have evolved with the adoption of improved seeds and fertilizers, leading to increased yields despite reduced farmland and encroachment issues. Economic diversification is evident as many Tharus engaged in non-traditional occupations such as wage labor, service sector jobs, and running businesses which improved their economic condition. Interaction with other ethnic groups has influenced cultural practices leading to the adaptation of new norms and changes in traditional ceremonies. Overall the tharu communities demonstrate resilience and adaptability, integrating new practices while improving their social-economic conditions. **Conclusion:** The Tharu community in the Surkhet district has experienced significant socio-economic transformations due to developmental interventions and interactions with other ethnic groups. These changes include improved education, healthcare, housing, and agricultural practices, increasing yields, and economic diversification.

KEYWORDS

Tharu community, developmental interventions, socio-economic changes, agricultural practices, Cultural adaptations

BACKGROUND:

The Tharu community and indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in Nepal's Terai region, has a distinct cultural heritage and social structure. Historically the tharus of Surkhet district have relied on agricultural and livestock rearing as their primary means of subsistence. Their traditional way of life, marked by unique customs and social norms, has remained relatively unchanged for centuries. However, the socioeconomic status of the Tharu community has begun to shift significantly due to various developmental interventions and the migration of hill people into their region.^(1,2)

Surkhet district, located in Karnali province, hosts a tharu population of approximately 9000 individuals with 52% females and 48% males.⁽³⁾ Traditionally tharus households have been characterized by farming and livestock rearing. Yet the increasing population and migration have led to interactions with other ethnic groups resulting in a blending of cultures and the adoption of new techniques and practices. These interactions have introduced various changes in the tharu lifestyle and social settings, impacting multiple sectors such as education, health, agriculture, transportation, communication, and housing.⁽⁴⁾

Over the past few decades, developmental interventions have aimed to uplift the socio-economic status of the Tharu community. These initiatives include educational programs, healthcare services, economic empowerment projects, and infrastructure development. Consequently, significant improvements have been observed in these areas. Education facilities have improved, leading to higher educational attainment among younger tharus. Healthcare services have become more accessible, contributing to better overall health outcomes. Infrastructure developments, such as improved roads and communication networks, have facilitated greater mobility and connectivity, enhancing access to various services and opportunities.⁽⁵⁾ Agricultural practices within the tharus community have also evolved. Adapting new farming methods, including the use of improved seeds, fertilizers, and vegetable farming, has increased agricultural productivity. Despite facing challenges like reduced landholdings and overpopulation encroaching on farmland and forest. The tharus have managed to yield more grains from the same areas of land.⁽⁶⁾ However,

many tharus now work in other fields sharing the product with land owners as their landholdings are often insufficient for subsistence farming.⁽⁷⁾

Economic diversification has become a necessity for the tharus communities. Due to these changes, many tharus individuals have moved away from traditional farming and are now engaged in services, wage labor, and running shops. This shift has helped to address some of the economic challenges faced by the community, providing new sources of income and improving their overall quality of life.⁽⁸⁾

In summary, the tharu community of Surkhet district is undergoing significant socio-economic changes driven by developmental interventions and cultural interactions. These changes reflect the community's resilience and adaptability, highlighting the importance of continuous support and culturally sensitive developmental programs to foster sustainable growth and improve living standards for the tharu people.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these transformations informing future policies and interventions that can further support the tharus community in their journey towards socio-economic development.

METHODS:

Study Design:

This research is a cross-sectional study designed to examine the developmental interventions and social changes in the community in the Surkhet district of Nepal. The study was conducted in Surkhet district located in Karnali province in Nepal. The district hosts a population of approximately 9000 tharu individuals distributed across several clusters. The target population for this study includes all Tharu households in Surkhet district. From this population, a sample of 50 tharu households were selected, the sampling method used was stratified random sampling to ensure that the sample was representative of the different clusters within the district. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture information

on demographic characteristics, socio-economic status, agricultural practices, developmental interventions, cultural adaptations, and lifestyle changes.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and other quantitative variables. Impact of developmental intervention and changes in socioeconomic status. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically to identify the key pattern and insight.

Ethical Consideration:

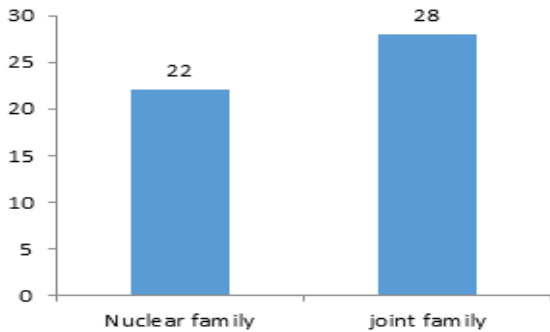
Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection, ensuring that participation was voluntary and confidentiality was maintained.

RESULT:

Population And Demographics:

The Tharu community in Padampur and Bhawanpur, Surkhet district, Nepal, predominantly comprises small households with an average of 5 members. The population is characterized by a significant presence of youth, with a preference for love marriages over arranged ones.

Figure 1: Family structure



Livelihood and Economic Status:

Most Tharu families engage in agriculture and sharecropping, with average land holdings of 5 kattha per family. The primary sources of income vary, with 54% earning between 10,000-20,000 NPR per month, and 86% finding their income sufficient for daily needs but challenging to save.

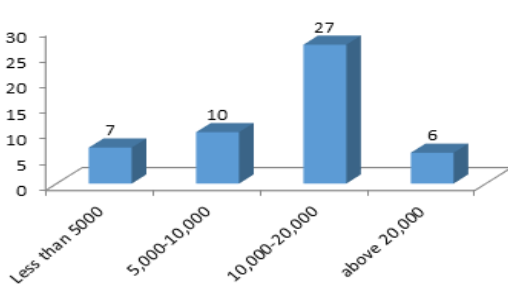
Table 1: Source of income

Source Of Income	No. of Respondents	%
Agriculture	22	44
Service	20	40
Business	7	14
Others	1	2

Table 2: Land owned by respondents

OWN LAND	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	%
Less than 5 kattha	14	28%
5 – 10 kattha	24	48%
More than 10 kattha	12	24%

Figure 3: Average Income of Family



Health And Sanitation:

Healthcare access is widespread, with 86% preferring health centers for treatment. Family planning awareness is high (90%), with 72% opting for temporary methods. Almost all deliveries (99%) occur in hospitals, promoting safer childbirth practices.

Figure 4: Knowledge about family planning

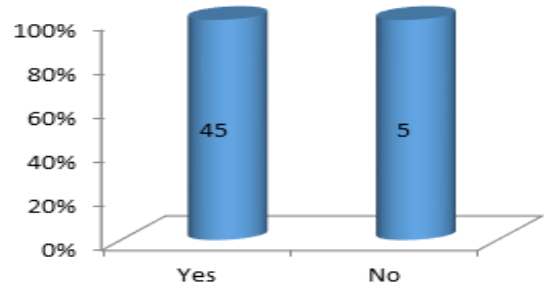
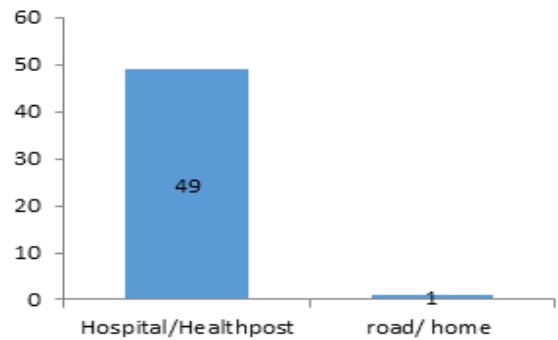


Figure 5: Delivery of pregnant women



Education And Social Changes:

Education levels are improving, with 68% having completed secondary education. Socially, there is a shift towards modern clothing preferences (46%) over traditional Tharu attire (30%), and increased internet usage (30%) among the younger generation.

Table 3: Education Level of Respondents

Education Level of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage
Below SLC	25	50
Intermediate	15	30
Bachelor	8	16
Master	2	4

Infrastructure And Development:

Infrastructure development shows progress, with 100% household toilet coverage and diverse housing types (54% cement and brick). Communication is primarily through mobile phones (96%), reflecting improved connectivity.

Table 4: Types of House

TYPES OF HOUSE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	%
Mud and Brick	20	40%
Cement and Brick	27	54%
Cemented with Tiles/Marbles	03	06%

Cultural and Environmental Practices:

Cultural practices are evolving, with 70% preferring love marriages. Environmental practices include widespread water purification (60%) and diversified fuel use for cooking (56% LP gas).

Figure 6: Marriage

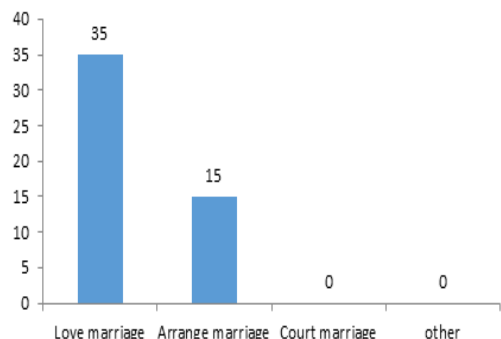
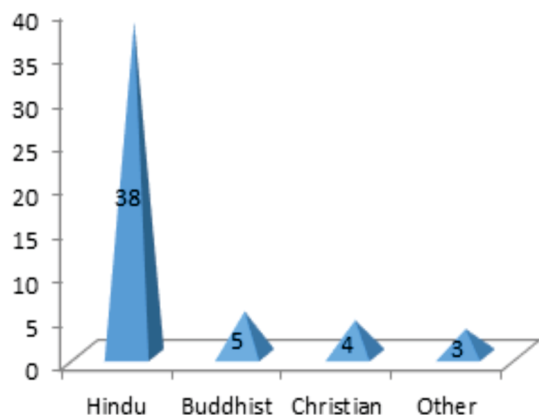


Figure 2: Religion



DISCUSSION:

The Tharu community in Surkhet District, Nepal, has undergone significant developmental interventions that have brought about notable social changes across various domains. This discussion explores these transformations through the lens of recent studies on Tharu communities, highlighting both the unique aspects observed and the broader implications for community development.

Livelihood Strategies and Economic Impact:

Studies on Tharu communities emphasize the significance of agricultural practices and landholding patterns, echoing findings that underscore the community's reliance on agriculture and sharecropping as primary livelihood strategies^(9,10). These economic practices not only sustain livelihoods but also reflect adaptive responses to local environmental and economic conditions⁽¹¹⁾.

Healthcare Access and Maternal Health:

Recent research highlights improvements in healthcare access among Tharu populations, particularly in maternal health services and institutional childbirth rates.⁽¹²⁾ The implementation of the Nepal and Safe Motherhood Program has been pivotal in reducing maternal mortality and improving maternal health outcomes within the community⁽¹³⁾.

Educational Advancements and Social Dynamics:

Educational attainment among Tharu youth has seen positive trends, with increasing enrollments in secondary education reflecting broader socio-economic changes and aspirations for higher education.⁽¹⁴⁾ These changes are indicative of shifting social norms and aspirations within the community.⁽¹⁵⁾

Infrastructure Development and Cultural Preservation:

Infrastructure development initiatives, such as improved sanitation facilities and housing conditions, have contributed to enhancing living standards while preserving cultural heritage⁽¹⁶⁾. Efforts to balance modernization with cultural preservation are evident in studies examining the community and response to changing socio-economic landscapes.⁽¹⁷⁾

Environmental Sustainability and Community Resilience:

The research underscores the Tharu community's sustainable agricultural practices and environmental stewardship, including the adoption of organic farming techniques and diversified fuel sources⁽¹⁸⁾. These practices contribute to community resilience against environmental challenges and align with global sustainability goals⁽¹⁹⁾.

In conclusion, the developmental interventions and social changes observed in the Tharu community of Surkhet District underscore their adaptive capacity and resilience amidst evolving socio-economic dynamics. By synthesizing findings from recent studies, this discussion highlights the community's progress in healthcare, education, livelihoods, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. These insights not only contribute to understanding the Tharu community and development trajectory but also offer lessons for sustainable community development practices in similar rural contexts.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, the Tharu community in Padampur and Bhawanpur exhibits signs of socioeconomic advancement, characterized by improved healthcare access, educational attainment, and infrastructure development. Cultural and social changes are evident, reflecting a blend of traditional values with modern influences. Indigenous people of this site, Tharus, are changing due to the impacts created by development intervention and interactions with hill migrants. Accepting and adopting new traditions, ideas, and cultural practices influenced by hill migrants have a positive effect on Tharu's living standard. Moreover, after the developmental intervention both positive and negative impacts can be seen among Tharu people. They have adopted new techniques and ideas about farming systems. They are attracted to new kinds of occupation and the educational atmosphere is also developing among them. They are becoming more civilized, healthier, and more educated than before.

On the other hand, development intervention has challenged Tharus in many ways. They have been facing new problems of sustaining the subsistence livelihood systems due to over-exploitation of natural resources. Some of their land holdings have been lost. They are losing their native culture and philosophy of lifestyle as guided by their traditional religion. Their socio-cultural life is heavily dominated by Hinduism. They are losing self-confidence and self-identity about their traditions, language, and beliefs. On one hand, their ethnic identity is gradually vanishing.

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