

Pragyaratna (प्रज्ञारत्न)

A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal



Youth Migration in the Tamang Community of Kakani Rural Municipality

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Article Info

Abstract

Received: September 16, 2025

Accepted: November 15, 2025

Published: December 20, 2025

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another in search of a better life. Youth migration refers explicitly to the process of moving, especially among young people aged 15 to 24 years. This study examines the reasons behind youth migration within the Tamang community in Kakani Rural Municipality, Nuwakot District. To achieve this, data were gathered using a case study approach within a qualitative framework. In-depth interviews and observations were conducted with seven family members from the Tamang community to gain an understanding of their experiences with youth migration. The study is guided by conflict theory and presents youth migration not only as an individual choice but also as a consequence of structural inequalities, resource struggles, and societal power dynamics. The migration of Tamang youth was primarily driven by factors such as lack of employment opportunities in the village, economic hardship, poor quality education, peer and family pressure, disinterest in traditional work, and the search for a more secure future. Therefore, implementing local employment programs aimed at youth in rural areas may help to reduce this migration trend to some extent.

Keywords: Youth migration, economic crisis, unemployment, rural area, tamang youth

Migration is the process by which people move from one place to another, either permanently or temporarily. It involves individuals or groups leaving their original residence and relocating to a new location. Migration can be internal (within a country) or external/international (from one country to another) (CBS, 2014). Youth migration specifically refers to the movement of young people, typically those aged 15 to 24 years old. This age group often migrates for education, jobs, to seek a better lifestyle, or for other personal growth opportunities. Since young people are the most mobile social group, they constitute a large share of total migration (ILO; UN, 2016). Today, youth migration has become a complex and significant issue. Its impact is especially noticeable in Nepal, where many young people are forced to leave their country in search of better opportunities abroad. In recent years, youth migration in Nepal has risen sharply, mainly driven by the pursuit of employment and educational prospects. Although existing literature highlights the high mobility of youth due to these reasons and discusses general migration principles, there is a shortage of specific data on the socioeconomic and psychological impacts of youth migration within Nepal. Furthermore, few targeted studies explore how family structures, community dynamics, and long-term national development are influenced by increased youth mobility.

Kakani Rural Municipality is situated in a hilly area of Nuwakot District, Bagmati Province. According to the 2078 National Census, it has 6012 households, 6388 families, and a total population of 24,323. The community is diverse, with people from various castes and religions. About half of the population consists of Tamang. The primary occupation of residents is farming, though some work in hotels and businesses. The migration of Tamang youth from this area is increasing rapidly. Since 2000, Nepal has experienced a significant rise in youth migrating abroad for work. The primary

reasons include a lack of local job opportunities, the pursuit of higher education, economic disparities between rural and urban areas, and a desire for improved living standards (Bhattra, 2024; Munkami et al., 2024). Climate change has also reduced agricultural productivity, and social media influence has encouraged young people to seek opportunities abroad (Arsalan et al., 2021; Khadka, 2023). Each year, over 700,000 young Nepalese leave to work abroad, primarily between the ages of 18 and 44, indicating that the most active working-age population is outside the country (ORF Online, 2024; The Annapurna Express, 2025). Over the past decade, more than 400,000 students have obtained permission to study abroad, showing a growing trend of educational migration (IOM). Lee (1966) proposed four main factors influencing migration in his 'Theory of Leftward Migration': origin region, destination region, intermediate barriers, and personal factors. This theory provides a basic framework for understanding migration decisions. Despite existing research on youth migration in Nepal, there is a lack of data on the factors influencing migration in steep rural areas, such as Kakani Rural Municipality, particularly among Tamang youth. Additionally, the socioeconomic, cultural, and agricultural impacts of rapid out-migration on households and community development in Kakani have not been thoroughly studied.

In the context of Nepal, Joshi and Dahal (2024) studied the factors that influence youth migration intentions. Their study shows that the desire for economic opportunities, access to quality education, and the hope for a better standard of living motivate Nepali youth to migrate. In Nepal, political instability, unemployment issues, weaknesses in the education system, parental influence, and expectations of opportunities abroad have driven young students to migrate (Adhikari, 2025). Similarly, in Kosovo, Blazevska (2017) noted that economic, social, and political factors significantly influence youth migration. In a qualitative study on youth migration intentions in Ghana, Dako-Geke (2016) identified economic hardship and the pursuit of a better future as key reasons. While these studies offer insights into youth migration across different regions, there is a lack of detailed research on the root causes of Tamang youth migration, particularly in specific areas such as Dobhan in Kakani Rural Municipality, Nuwakot District. A notable gap exists in understanding the socio-cultural influences of the local Tamang community on migration. This study aims to investigate the primary factors influencing youth migration within the Tamang community in Kakani Rural Municipality.

Methodology

This study is guided by conflict theory. The conflict perspective sees society as a continual arena of competition and struggle over resources, power, and prestige among various groups, emphasizing social inequalities and power relationships as central elements of social structure and change. Using critical inquiry, this study views reality as socially constructed and constantly evolving through the interplay of social, political, economic, and historical power dynamics. It also aims to demonstrate that the migration of young people from the Tamang community of Kakani is a result of societal inequalities and power struggles. This research uses a case study approach within a qualitative research design. The case study method allows for an in-depth understanding of a specific event within its real-life context (Yin, 2009). Purposive sampling was employed to explore the complex social and cultural contexts of indigenous communities, such as the Tamang. Seven cases (including five household heads and two youth returnee migrants) were selected based on their relevance and potential to contribute to the research goals. Household members chosen for interviews included those with young members who migrated for education or work. Data collection involved semi-structured and open-ended interviews focused on the main reasons for youth migration, including economic, educational, and social aspirations. Verbal and written consent were obtained, and confidentiality was maintained in accordance with national research standards. Participants were interviewed in-depth to build rapport with key informants from various age groups, genders, and social backgrounds, including family members of migrants, village elders, women, and other community stakeholders. Extensive field notes were taken during interviews, observations, and informal conversations, capturing participant statements, discussion contexts, event sequences, and the researcher's immediate thoughts, feelings, and analyses. These diverse data sources contributed to a comprehensive understanding of youth migration and its effects. Thematic analysis, based on the framework developed by Braun and Clark (2006), was used to analyze the qualitative data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and field notes were reviewed multiple times to examine

the data thoroughly. The data were coded for relevant passages related to the research questions and conflict theory concepts, with similar codes grouped into ten themes for interpretation and analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The main reasons young people leave rural areas include the lack of jobs and economic crises in their villages, conflicts between traditional livelihoods and modern attractions, a shortage of work that matches local skills, limited access to quality education and a secure future, family and social pressures, peer pressure, concerns about village development and prospects, low respect for village work, fascination with earning money abroad, and the creation of forced narratives.

Lack of Employment and Economic Crisis in the Village

The main reason Tamang youth leave their villages is due to a lack of sufficient local employment and economic hardship. This situation has forced them to migrate to urban areas or abroad in search of a better future for themselves and their families. Statements such as “Sometimes in the village, we only get work for 2-3 months depending on the season” (Case 2) or “There is no work according to our skills, even if we get a job that matches our skills, we do not get any work at all, and even if we do, we earn little, and we just survive on our own” (Case 4) highlight their economic struggles, and the participants’ experiences further confirm this reality. As Case 6 explains, “If we had such a good job, we would have stayed in the village, but due to lack of opportunities, we had to go out and earn a living. We had to raise our children.” This situation reveals the significant gap and unequal distribution of economic opportunities in society. When young people cannot meet their basic needs and daily goals even through hard work in their community, they are driven to seek alternatives. Groups feeling deprived of resources and chances try to change their circumstances, and migration reflects this effort. It represents their ongoing pursuit of economic security and a better quality of life, which is hindered by economic inequality and limited opportunities within society. Therefore, Tamang youth migration appears to be driven more by economic constraints and uncertainty about the future than by personal desire, prompting them to leave their homes.

Crisis of Traditional Livelihood and Modern Attraction

Some young people from the Tamang community have left their villages, disillusioned with traditional work such as farming, and are attracted to the modern, comfortable lifestyle of the city or abroad. This creates a conflict between the old way of life and the ambitions of the new generation. According to conflict theory, there is always tension between old and new ideas in society. Although agriculture is the primary livelihood of the Tamang community, this work is demanding and yields a low income. Young people exposed to the outside world through education and media may find this work unappealing. They are drawn to the modern lifestyle of urban areas or overseas, which offers good food and convenience. Participant Case 3 said that people leave their villages “in search of happiness, who do not like to dress well and eat well.” According to Case 5, “The practice of not farming or using a hoe has increased a lot in the village, and if you have a little money, no one in the village wants to suffer.” Case 6 also mentioned, “Everyone wants happiness, there is not much work in the village, there is no enthusiasm for farming, if you have the benefits of foreign money, everyone has lost their enthusiasm for work.” These statements indicate that interest in traditional farming has declined, while the desire for a modern lifestyle has grown.

This is a conflict between the old production system and new ambitions. They claim that foreign money has lost its enthusiasm highlights the adverse effects of remittances and a decline in interest in traditional skills. The migration of Tamang youth is also driven by a dislike for the traditional, challenging lifestyle and a strong desire for a modern, comfortable life.

Lack of Work-Related Skills in the Village

Although some youth from the Tamang community have acquired skills or returned from abroad, they are often compelled to leave the village again because there are insufficient opportunities to utilize their skills locally and earn a decent income. This situation highlights the large gap between the skills of the youth and the opportunities available in the village. Skills should be utilized effectively to benefit society, but when society fails to value them, conflicts can arise. According to conflict theory, dissatisfaction increases when workers are not fairly paid. Even with their skills, the Tamang youth

struggle to implement their plans due to limited local markets, poor infrastructure, or low demand for their talents. Participant Case 4 mentioned that “Those who do not get work according to their skills in their village and return with the skills they learned abroad and do nothing in the village are also forced to leave again because they are unable to succeed, lose their investment, and return.” He expressed disappointment, saying, “Even if some youth who have gone abroad come back with the idea of doing something, there is no example of even five percent being successful.” These statements show that, despite having skills, opportunities are limited and the environment is unfriendly. Experiences like not finding jobs suited to their skills reveal weaknesses in the local economy and a lack of systems that support entrepreneurship. This causes conflict between youth and society. When young people struggle even after investing in their skills, frustration grows. Despite their abilities, the lack of suitable opportunities and the inability to become self-reliant have significantly contributed to the migration of Tamang youth.

Lack of Good Education and Secured Future

The lack of quality education in villages and uncertainty about a bright future also significantly influence youth migration from the Tamang community. The fact that young people and their parents are drawn to cities or abroad in search of better education and a secure future clearly illustrates this. Although education is often seen as the key to progress, conflict theory suggests that unequal access to essential resources, such as education, creates societal inequality, benefiting some groups while leaving others behind. The availability of quality education in rural areas where the Tamang live is limited. While schools do exist, common issues include ineffective teaching, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a lack of higher education institutions. The cases in this study highlight this educational inequality and concerns for the future. The statement “Children have no future in the village, they do not get any opportunities to do anything,” (Case 4) reflects a deep mistrust of the future at the local level. Echoing parental views, another case states, “There is no work to invest in education; they do not even get a job to cover the cost of education, but rather let your child go abroad and earn much money.” This reveals a local dislike for education and employment, as well as a fascination with foreign countries. His statement, “There is no need to invest in the caste of a daughter who goes to someone else’s house; the place to earn the most money is abroad,” also highlights misconceptions about education and gender inequality. These statements show that inequality in educational opportunities and worries about the future are key factors driving youth migration.

When parents lack confidence in the local education system, it indicates a structural problem. From a conflict perspective, this underscores a struggle to access the educational resources and opportunities needed to build a future. The pressure to compete with rural youth, despite their limited educational backgrounds, often leads to these students falling behind. The migration of Tamang youth is driven by conflicts arising from poor-quality education, worries about the future, widespread inequality in educational opportunities, and economic factors.

Family Pressure

Some young people from the Tamang community are forced to leave their villages for the city or abroad against their wishes in order to fulfill their family’s hopes or due to family pressure. This situation highlights the conflict that often arises between youth and their parents within the family. While it is natural for parents to want a better future for their children, the thoughts and dreams of young people often differ from those of their parents. Parents want their children to go abroad and earn money to bring happiness to their families, and they can directly pressure them to do so. The experience of participant Case 5 illustrates this conflict: “After passing grade 12, I plan to get a job in Nepal as much as possible, but my family wants me to go abroad. If you go abroad, everyone’s children go abroad. What are you doing here?” This statement shows that family pressure has discouraged young people, as in this case. Case 4 also mentioned that “the desire of parents is for their children to go abroad and earn money, so young people are being forced to leave the village.” These statements suggest that family aspirations and pressure greatly influence young people’s migration decisions.

From a conflict perspective, this highlights a power imbalance within the family, with parents wielding more authority than the youth. This raises questions about the youth’s authority and right to self-determination. Therefore, it appears that, in addition to their personal choices, strong family

expectations and pressures also significantly influence the migration of Tamang youth.

Search for Security and Stability

Some young people from the Tamang community have been leaving their villages to find safer living conditions due to various forms of insecurity and an uncertain future. People need safety along with necessities. When their environment feels unsafe, they seek safer options. In the mountainous areas where the Tamang live, there may be risks of political instability or natural disasters, which cause the youth to worry about what the future holds. This sense of insecurity motivates them to move to more stable and secure places. Participant Case 4 expressed concern, saying, “The political instability of this country means that sometimes you do not know what will happen, even if you do business, you do not know where it will go, and that is why this situation has arisen.” Case 6 mentioned that “even if some farming is done, it is difficult to grow crops, monkeys cause many problems, and the villagers alone cannot do much to solve it; the entire government and the rural municipality have come up with programs.” These statements show that the search for safety and stability, along with economic and social factors, also drives migration. While political instability makes the overall future uncertain, issues caused by monkeys pose a serious threat to livelihoods. When the government ignores these problems, people become frustrated. From a conflict perspective, this highlights a gap in the relationship between citizens and the state. The insecurity and uncertainty about the future in the villages also seem to have led to the migration of Tamang youth.

Social Pressure and Culture of Peer Pressure

Even if the village isn't facing serious economic issues, some young people from the Tamang community leave because they see friends or neighbors who have gone abroad succeeding, or because going abroad is perceived as a symbol of status. This social pressure and peer influence motivate young people to migrate. Since humans are social beings, it's natural to be influenced by others' lifestyles. When young people observe the economic benefits and lifestyle changes of those who have returned from abroad, they also want to achieve a similar standard of living. Going abroad is seen as a sign of success or modernity, and questions like “Why didn't you go?” from the community add to the social pressure. Case 4 in the study confirms this trend, stating, “They see interesting places and photos abroad, hear sweet gossip, and the imitation of others is also forcing young people to leave the village.” According to Case 5, families think, “Everyone's children are going abroad, but you are being pressured to stay here and do what you want, and the prestige of going abroad is different, and you get to play for money.” These statements indicate that, in addition to economic factors, social and psychological influences also drive migration. The desire to imitate others and the growing prestige of going abroad have encouraged more young people to leave.

This is a contest for prestige and social acceptance. While studying abroad is seen as a symbol of success, young people do not want to fall behind in this race. In addition to financial difficulties, the migration of Tamang youth is also driven by peer pressure, the desire for social status, and the influence of family and community.

Low Respect for Village Work and Fascination with Earning Money Abroad

Some young people from the Tamang community leave their village because their work isn't respected or does not pay enough. They are also attracted to working abroad to earn more money and gain respect in society. This highlights how local labor is undervalued and how people are overly drawn to opportunities outside their community. It reflects the importance society places on certain types of work and how this influences people's choices. In the Tamang community, young people might look down on traditional farming, viewing going abroad as a status symbol and a sign of success. Case 5, a participant, explained his family's perspective: “No matter how big a job you get here, you always face difficulties doing it, but going abroad is seen as prestigious. You get to handle a lot of money, and the income from abroad is higher when you bring it home.” This portrays a negative view of Nepal's income and associates going abroad as a symbol of prestige. Case 6 says, “If I could save 10 to 12 thousand per month from village work, I would stay in the village, but I would not earn enough. Even if I got a job, it is hard to support myself.” These statements reveal how economic needs and the desire for social recognition and respect influence migration.

This highlights the inequality and conflict between local and foreign workers, as well as the

rewards they receive. When society does not recognize the hard work of locals, despair spreads among the youth. The migration of Tamang youth is driven by the socio-economic undervaluation of local labor and the lure of foreign earnings and prestige.

Village Development Concern and Future

Another main reason Tamang youth leave their hometowns is the slow development of their villages. The lack of good job opportunities nearby and uncertainty about the future have pushed young people to seek other options. When government agencies neglect a community's growth, its residents inevitably fall behind. In Tamang-majority areas, there is an apparent lack of investment and planning in areas such as establishing new industries, supporting modern farming methods, or promoting youth-centered, skill-based jobs. The examples further show this point. The statement (Case 1) that "If there is not much work to be done in the village, if employment was created, if modern agricultural systems were adopted, would the process of going abroad have been stopped?" indicates the lack of development opportunities. Another participant (Case 6) said that local authorities, "if the government allocated a budget and operated some good factories at the local level, employment would be created, and people could earn money and work in their own villages, and why should they leave the village?" The comment in Case 4 that "Do not go, just stay here, there is no place where you can earn a decent living," shows there is no strong reason to stay in the village. He pointed out the tough reality that "the village has not developed due to the political turmoil of the country, the future here is uncertain, and the children have no future in the village." These statements suggest that Tamang youth are migrating not out of desire, but due to slow village development and serious concerns about what lies ahead.

From the perspective of conflict theory, this situation highlights the structural inequality between the state and marginalized communities in terms of access to resources, opportunities, and development. The migration of youth is directly caused by systemic neglect and uneven growth, pushing them to fight for their own futures and those of their families. The migration of Tamang youth is not just an individual choice but a consequence of slow rural development and collective concerns about the future.

Constructing a Narrative of Compulsion

Many young people from the Tamang community and their families see leaving the village as their last and only option due to various problems and hardships, which reveals a deep sense of necessity in their lives. This situation raises questions about their ability to make free decisions. Although individuals should be able to decide freely, socio-economic circumstances pressure them to choose a particular path. According to conflict theory, power structures and inequalities restrict a person's options and opportunities. When Tamang youth find employment, education, development, security, and a dignified life closed off in the village, migration becomes not just an option but a necessity. Participant Case 4 mentioned that "There is always a shortage of money, so there is a compulsion to go abroad, and the combination of others' appearances, the pressure of one's own home, and the wishes of one's parents are forcing young people to leave the village." Case 6 also expressed this sense of pressure by saying, "Even if you say 'do not go, just stay here,' it is not like you are forced to leave the village. If there was an environment where you could earn a living in the village, why would you leave your family and go?" These statements clearly show that migration is seen as a necessity. Systemic inequality forces individuals to make certain decisions. In such circumstances, young people become prisoners of their environment. Youth migration in the Tamang community is primarily driven by the sense of necessity created by deprivation, limited opportunities, and an uncertain future.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that various socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors shape youth movement within the Tamang community in Kakani Rural Municipality. Many of these factors match previous migration research, but they also reveal unique local dynamics. First, the lack of employment opportunities and the ongoing economic crisis in the village align with national data, showing that Nepali youth migrate mainly due to unemployment and low rural income levels (Bhattarai, 2024; Munakami et al., 2024). Participants' mentions of seasonal work and low earnings reflect a broader trend of foreign employment as a survival strategy. However, the study highlights a deeper lived experience of economic hardship in a specific rural, ethnic community, which existing

literature has not fully explored.

The shift away from traditional farming livelihoods and the appeal of modern lifestyles align with research indicating that the desire for better living standards, media influence, and lifestyle aspirations are the main drivers of youth migration (Arsalan et al., 2021; Khadka, 2023). This research uncovers a broader cultural conflict between traditional agriculture and young people's goals, highlighting emotional and identity-driven motives that are rarely emphasized in the literature, unlike other studies focused on modernization in general. The finding that rural areas lack markets, infrastructure, and sectors that can employ skilled labor is further supported by the mismatch between young people's skills and local opportunities (Bhattarai, 2024). However, this study contributes to the literature by illustrating ongoing migration cycles where youth return with skills but leave again due to unsuccessful entrepreneurial efforts a problem that has received less attention in other research.

Similarly, evidence showing that Nepali young people travel in search of better educational opportunities is supported by the lack of high-quality education in rural areas (IOM; Khadka, 2023). By highlighting structural inequality and illustrating how uneven access to educational resources directly pushes adolescents away, participants' mistrust of the village education system reinforces conflict theory. However, previous research has not sufficiently addressed this mistrust and gender-based prejudices related to schooling. Consistent with research recognizing the influence of families on migration decisions, family pressure and intergenerational conflict also emerged as significant factors. Unlike studies that portray families as supporters, this study focuses on situations where young people feel pressured or coerced by family expectations—revealing more intense emotional and psychological conflicts that are often not reported in national migration research.

The results also show how migration is influenced by social insecurity, including political instability, livelihood uncertainties, and risks to wildlife. While national instability is discussed in ORF Online (2024) and The Annapurna Express (2025), this study focuses on micro-level vulnerabilities—such as crop loss caused by monkeys—that are not yet covered in the literature but significantly impact rural communities. Peer pressure and social influences align with research indicating that migration is becoming a social norm among young people in Nepal (ILO; UN, 2016). However, the Tamang community's strong sense of status, imitation, and rivalry highlights a social-psychological aspect that is rarely examined in previous studies. Additionally, earlier findings about the value placed on foreign employment are supported by the low social respect for village work and the fascination with earning money abroad (Bhattarai, 2024). Nonetheless, this research underscores the emotional burden of social comparison and the devaluation of rural labor in ways that are not fully reflected in the national discourse.

Lastly, larger studies highlighting unequal development between rural and urban areas underscore concerns about delayed rural progress and reduced future opportunities (Arsalan et al., 2021; Munakami et al., 2024). However, this analysis provides strong local evidence of political neglect and insufficient government investment, supporting Lee's (1966) migratory "push factors" linked to disadvantages in the origin area, even though the wider literature tends to focus on structural inequality. Overall, this study confirms the main causes of youth migration identified in both national and international research. Nevertheless, it offers a unique contribution by providing detailed, community-specific insights that reveal structural neglect, emotional pressures, cultural conflicts, and micro-level insecurities shaping the migration choices of Tamang youth in Kakani Rural Municipality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that youth migration among the Tamang community is not just a matter of personal choice or the pursuit of economic opportunities, but also a forced departure due to difficulties in earning a living from limited resources. The lack of development infrastructure and investment in the villages has caused many young people to leave their homes, facing an uncertain future. Inadequate educational opportunities in the villages, combined with the fear of not finding better prospects even after studying, draw youth and their parents to cities or abroad. Conflict theory suggests that imitating others and being attracted to foreign countries are complex phenomena rooted in deep inequalities and power struggles within the broader socio-economic and political structure. The vivid experiences of the case studies reveal that Tamang youth are compelled to leave their communities due to a lack of

opportunities, structural barriers, and future uncertainty, rather than simply seeking opportunities. This situation has created disparities in the distribution of resources, power, and development opportunities between the state and marginalized communities.

Although the community views going abroad as a symbol of status and success, young people often migrate due to social and peer pressure. Some youths migrate unwillingly to fulfill their family's dreams or because of family pressure. As a result, youth migration is the result of a complex mix of economic, social, and political factors, rather than a single cause. To some extent, controlling youth migration involves implementing employment programs aimed at young people locally and providing training focused on self-employment. While youth migration has brought some economic benefits to the Tamang community, more research is needed to understand its impacts on local society, culture, and families.

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