

**Changing Role of Tamang Women at Household Level in Mahalaxmi Municipality-10,
Lalitpur, Nepal ---- by Neupane G. P.**

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Abstract

This study analyzed the changing role of Tamang women at the household level in Mahalaxmi Municipality-10 (Lakuri-Bhanjyang), Lalitpur. The study explored their socio-economic situation, their changing role in improving family livelihoods, and their perceptions of these changes. The research used a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, combining a household survey of 120 families with in-depth narrative interviews with nine Tamang women and three local elected representatives. The data reveal a community in significant transition. Households are moving away from a traditional agriculture-based occupation due to small landholdings and food insecurity, shifting instead towards diversified cash-based livelihoods like business, wage labor, and tourism. Within this transition, Tamang women are becoming central figures and change agents in their family and community. Their roles have expanded beyond subsistence agricultural work to become key managers of household finances and operations of local shops and business. They actively participate in informal savings groups, make important decisions about children's education and daily expenses, and contribute to cash income. While this grants them greater economic agency and dignity, their control over major assets like land remains limited, and their political engagement is very low. The Tamang women perceived their changing role as a move towards modernity and improved family livelihoods, yet they also expressed concern about the erosion of the Tamang language and culture. The study concludes that the changing role of Tamang women is a story of adaptive resilience, as they navigate new economic realities while

balancing aspirations for progress with a desire to preserve their cultural identity. The study thus recommends supporting women through formalized cooperatives, legal literacy, and skill training, while urging local government to implement gender-sensitive policies and initiatives that both promote economic opportunity and safeguard cultural heritage.

Keywords

Changing role, Household level, Resilience, Tamang women, Women empowerment

Introduction

Nepal is a nation characterized by profound ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, home to 142 distinct caste/ethnic groups, each with unique traditions, social structures, and histories (NSO, 2024). This pluralistic social fabric, however, is marked by significant inequalities in social, economic, and political status among different communities. Within this complex mosaic, the Tamang people represent one of the largest indigenous (Adivasi Janajati) groups, constituting 5.6 percent of the national population (UN, 2022). Historically, the Tamang are recognized as the "ancient and original inhabitants" of the Himalayan regions, with their ancestral domain, Tamsaling, centering on the Kathmandu Valley (Aikman & Rao, 2023; Lama, 2010). Despite their historical presence and numerical significance, the Tamang community has experienced systemic marginalization. They have been described as the "true sons of soil and nature" who have faced generations of exploitation, leading to the erosion of their economy, society, and culture. Their access to education, political representation, and economic resources remains disproportionately low, and they are often relegated to menial labor such as portering and factory work (Tamang, 2019; Himal 2052). This marginalization is compounded by rapid socio-cultural changes, where modernization threatens traditional practices, language, and art forms like Tamang Selo, while deep-seated beliefs in supernatural forces persist (NDHS, 2016).

Situation of Tamang women is particularly precarious, shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities of gender, ethnicity, and class. Women's status in Nepalese society is not monolithic but is demarcated by geography, economy, and caste (Luitel, 2018). Tamang women, like many in the developing world, often have limited access to quality education and skill development, confining their contributions largely to the domestic sphere and exposing them to multiple socio-economic vulnerabilities. Their empowerment is further constrained by a lack of control over earnings and limited participation in decision-making processes. In the Nepalese context, gender construction is a contextual phenomenon that differs across cultural belief systems (Pasa & Thapa, 2025). While

the broad socio-cultural contours of the Tamang community have been documented, there is a critical gap in understanding the changing intra-household dynamics and roles of Tamang women, especially in the context of modernization and persistent marginalization. Existing literature provides a macro-level view of Tamang history and social structure (Tamang, 2009; Bista, 2052) and explores generic issues of women's poverty and microfinance (Adhikari, 2020; Shrestha, 2021). However, there is a lack of localized, studies examining how these broader forces—state policy, economic shifts, and cultural change—are actively reshaping the everyday lives, responsibilities, and agency of Tamang women at the household level. Their transformative role and empowerment helps to implement climate action strategies (Baschieri & Udeh, 2024).

Constitutional and policy framework in Nepal has evolved to address discrimination and promote gender equality. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees non-discrimination on grounds of sex, caste, or ethnicity. Preceding this, the Muluki Ain (National Code) of 1963 initiated significant legal reforms for women concerning family and property laws. Subsequent policy directives, including those in the Fifteenth Five Year Plan (2019-2023), have formally incorporated women's issues and aimed to increase their participation in development. However, a persistent gap exists between policy intent and enforcement, often due to a lack of resources, information, and skills at the local level, which limits their effectiveness for marginalized communities like the Tamang.

Empirical studies highlight both challenges and potential pathways for improvement. Research consistently shows low literacy and educational attainment among women from marginalized communities like the Tharu (Tharu, 2019) and low female participation in teaching (MoES, 2021). Studies on microfinance, such as those by Adhikari (2020) and Bista (2022), demonstrate that access to credit can improve income, consumption patterns, and self-confidence among rural women, enabling a shift from traditional to non-traditional activities. However, Shrestha (2021) also notes shortcomings, such as the potential exclusion of the "poorest of the poor" from such programs.

The Shreemadbhagavadgeeta, a seminal-influential philosophical scripture of the Sanatan Vedic tradition, presents a timeless dialogue on human ethics, duty, and liberation that resonates deeply with the contemporary global vision of sustainable development (Badal 2024). Gautama Buddha, the emblem of peace and love, pioneer of Buddhism, was born in Kapilabastu, Lumbini, Nepal. The peace and love. Compassion in Buddhism is the basic element of Sustainable development. Thus Buddha is the pioneer of sustainable development. Buddha's text Dhammapada in the present

sustainable era is more relevant than past (Badal, 2021). Thus community development and mobilization must be guided by Geeta and Buddha.

The existing body of work, while valuable, leaves a significant research gap. There is a lack of focused, ethnographic research on the Tamang community in Mahalaxmi Municipality, a historically Tamang-inhabited area near Kathmandu. Previous studies have not specifically investigated the interplay between changing socio-economic conditions and the evolving household roles of Tamang women in this locale. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a localized analysis in Mahalaxmi Municipality-10, Lakuri-Bhanjyang, to document and analyze the social and economic conditions of the Tamang people, with a specific focus on the changing roles and status of women within the household. The findings will contribute a micro-level perspective to the broader discourse on indigenous rights, gender equality, and inclusive development in Nepal.

Objectives and Methodology

This study aims to investigate the evolving status of Tamang women by first examining the socio-economic conditions of respondents in the area. It then analyzes the changing role these women play in improving family livelihoods, and finally explores the participants' own perceptions of this shifting dynamic within their households.

This study used convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to holistically analyze the changing roles of Tamang women at the household level, integrating quantitative and qualitative data for comprehensive analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The research was conducted in Ward No. 10 of Mahalaxmi Municipality, Lalitpur, an area selected for its mixed ethnic composition and the observable shift in women's domestic roles for livelihood improvement, despite its economic challenges and reliance on subsistence agriculture. The total population of the ward is 1066 across 193 households, from which a sample of 120 households (62.17%) was randomly selected as the primary unit of analysis, with data drawn from both married and unmarried female respondents (Municipal Profile, 2024). Quantitative primary data were collected through a semi-structured household survey from these 120 respondents to statistically outline socio-economic conditions. At the same time, qualitative insights were generated via in-depth narrative inquiry through key informant interviews with 12 purposively selected participants, including nine Tamang women and three local representatives. Secondary data from sources like CBS monographs and UN agencies supplemented this information. For analysis, the study utilized

a convergent phase where quantitative results from descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and cross-tabulations were analyzed separately but synthesized with thematic findings from qualitative narratives.

Results: Social-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic and socio-economic profile of the surveyed Tamang women paints a picture of a community navigating continuity and change. Characterized by a predominantly working-age population, the community exhibits diverse religious affiliations and a visible trend toward nuclear family structures. Persistent patriarchal norms, reflected in household headship patterns, intersect with generally modest educational attainment among women. This foundational profile establishes the key social contours within which the changing domestic roles, economic strategies, and personal perceptions of Tamang women are formed and negotiated.

Table 1. Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents (N=120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	15-25 years	12	10.00
	26-59 years	68	56.70
	60+ years	40	33.30
Marital status	Married	55	45.90
	Unmarried	43	35.80
	Widow	22	18.30
Religion	Hinduism	38	31.70
	Buddhism	31	25.80
	Christian	36	30.00
	Kirat	15	12.50
Family type	Nuclear family	56	46.70
	Joint family	44	36.70
	Extended family	20	16.60
Household head	Male	84	70.00
	Female	36	30.00
Children size	One child	31	26.00
	Two children	53	44.00

	Three children	24	20.00
	More than three children	10	8.30
	No child	2	1.70
Educational status	No formal schooling	17	14.20
	Informal/literate	24	20.00
	Primary (1-5)	10	8.30
	Lower secondary (6-8)	36	30.00
	Secondary (9-10)	12	10.00
	Higher secondary (+2)	10	8.30
	BA	6	5.00
	MA and Above	5	4.20

(Source: Study, 2025)

Demographic data reveals a community in transition, marked by both potential and constraint. With 66.7 percent of respondents in the economically active age range (15-59 years), there is a significant workforce; however, their agency is shaped by other factors. Educational attainment is limited, with 64.2 percent having an education level of lower secondary or below, and only 9.2 percent holding a Bachelor's degree or higher, which likely restricts economic mobility. While family structures show a trend toward nuclear units (46.7%), traditional patriarchy remains strong, evidenced by 70 percent of households being male-headed. This intersection of an active-age population, modest education, and enduring gender norms frames the complex environment in which Tamang women negotiate their changing domestic and economic roles.

Economic Situations of the Respondents

Socio-economic profile of the surveyed households paints a picture of a community navigating significant structural constraints and livelihood adaptation. Widespread lack of land ownership among women underscores the persistence of patriarchal inheritance systems, while a significant shift away from traditional agriculture toward diversified non-farm activities highlights a changing economic base. This transition is characterized by predominantly low income levels, yet it coexists with moderate material well-being reflected in the common ownership of basic consumer assets, pointing to a complex landscape of vulnerability, adaptation, and gradual integration into a cash-based economy.

Table 2. Consolidated Matrix of Socio-Economic Conditions (n=120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Land holding status	No land ownership	102	85.00
	Land ownership	18	15.00
Land size	Only residential land	15	12.50
	Less than 1 ropani	24	20.00
	1 to 2 ropani	29	24.10
	2 to 5 ropani	36	30.00
	5 to 10 ropani	12	10.00
	More than 10 ropani	4	3.40
Land tenure	Raikar (private)	87	72.50
	Guthi	12	10.00
	Tenant	21	17.50
Family food-sufficiency	Less than 3 months	15	12.50
	3-6 months	62	51.70
	6-9 months	43	35.80
Primary Occupation	Agriculture/livestock	21	17.50
	Business/trade	29	24.10
	Local wage labor	21	17.50
	Service/pension	17	14.20
	Remittances	17	14.20
	Driving	15	12.50
Monthly income	Rs. 4000 - 8000	60	50.00
	Rs. 8000 - 10000	36	30.00
	Rs. 10000 - 15000	12	10.00
	Rs. 15000 - 20000	10	8.30
	Above Rs. 20000	2	1.70
House type	Pakki (cemented)	48	40.00
	Ardhapakki (mixed)	48	40.00
	Kacchi (mud/wood)	17	14.20

	Others (Shake)	7	5.80
Assets owned	Radio, TV, mobile phone	120	100.00
	Smartphone	84	70.00
	Computer/laptop, refrigerator, sewing machine	60	50.00
	Motorcycle/scooter	24	20.00
	Car/jeep	3	2.50

(Source: Study, 2025)

Data reveals a community grappling with asset poverty yet actively diversifying its livelihoods. A stark 85 percent of women lack land ownership, directly reflecting patriarchal inheritance norms, while the majority of landowners hold small plots (e.g., 30% with 2-5 ropani). This limited agricultural base results in 51.7 percent of households achieving only 3-6 months of food sufficiency from their own land. Consequently, there has been a significant occupational shift, with only 17.5 percent remaining primarily in agriculture compared to higher engagement in business/trade (24.1%) and local wage labor (17.5%). This transition, however, has not yet yielded financial security, as 50 percent of respondents report a very low monthly income of between NPR 4,000-8,000. Materially, this translates into mixed-quality housing (40% pakki, 40% ardhapakki) but near-universal ownership of basic communication and entertainment assets (100% for radio, TV, mobile), signaling integration into modern consumer networks despite underlying economic vulnerability. The profile is thus one of a community in transition, where deep-seated structural inequalities in asset ownership coexist with adaptive livelihood strategies and modest consumption-level improvements.

Changing Role of Tamang Women

Analysis of women's participation and decision-making reveals a complex narrative of agency within traditional constraints. Tamang women demonstrate significant, though specialized, involvement in agricultural production and show a strong commitment to preserving their cultural heritage. However, their engagement in the formal political sphere remains minimal. A clear distinction exists in economic access, with widespread participation in informal community savings groups contrasting sharply with very limited individual control over major assets like land or bank accounts. This pattern extends to household decision-making, where women exercise

predominant authority in day-to-day domestic and educational matters, yet see their influence diminish significantly in decisions concerning agricultural production and major financial management, indicating a persistent gendered division of authority.

Table 3. Matrix of Women's Participation, Access, and Decision-Making Authority (n=120)

Variable	Category	Percent
Participation in commercial agriculture	Seeding	30.00
	Weeding	30.00
	Harvesting	20.00
	Livestock Care	20.00
Preserving Tamang culture through tourism	Yes	70.00
	No	30.00
Political Status	Having interest only	10.00
	Ever held any post	5.00
	No interest in Politics	85.00
Independent access to or control over assets	Bank account	20.00
	Savings/credit group (Dhukuti)	70.00
	Land/property in own name	10.00
Decision making for daily household expenses	Male	13.44
	Female	55.38
	Jointly by all members	31.18
Decision making for children's education	Male	25.74
	Female	47.52
	Jointly by all members	26.74
Decision making for agricultural activities/crops	Male	60.75
	Female	5.38
	Jointly by all members	33.87
Use of family savings/loans	Male	9.68
	Female	48.92
	Jointly by all members	41.40

(Source: Study, 2025)

Data reveals a clear pattern of gendered roles and access among Tamang women, highlighting areas of significant influence alongside persistent structural barriers. In agriculture, their participation is concentrated in recurring tasks like seeding and weeding (30% each), with less involvement in harvesting and livestock care (20% each). A strong majority (70%) are engaged in preserving Tamang culture by offering homestay tourism. Pasa (2021) also found that hospitality trainings provided to the Gurung women of Sirubari village by local development stakeholders helped them to operate homestay tourism efficiently. However, political engagement is strikingly low, with 85 percent expressing no interest and only 5 percent having ever held a post. Economic access shows a reliance on informal systems, with 70 percent participating in savings/credit groups (Dhukuti), while access to formal assets remains limited—only 20 percent have a bank account and a mere 10 percent hold land or property in their own name. Decision-making authority within households is distinctly gendered. Women are the primary final decision-makers in daily household expenses (55.38%) and children's education (47.52%), and they also lead in decisions on family savings/loans (48.92%). In stark contrast, men dominate decisions regarding agricultural activities (60.75%), underscoring a traditional division of authority where women manage the domestic and educational spheres while men control productive capital and land-based assets.

Thematic Analysis of Changing Roles and Realities

Narratives collected from Tamang women and community representatives reveal a profound societal transformation. The shifting roles at the household level are inextricably linked to powerful external forces. The change is not a single event, but a complex process driven by interconnected themes that reshape economic survival, social standing, and cultural identity as well.

Agriculture as Secondary Sources of Family Livelihood: Agriculture persists, but fails to provide complete sustenance, driving the need for supplementary income. [P2], who manages a family plot, explains, "*We have just two ropani. It is our life, but legally it is my husband's and will be my sons'. My labor is invisible in the papers.*" This theme underscores a critical contradiction: women are the primary caretakers of the agrarian tradition yet remain largely invisible in the legal framework of land ownership. This deficit necessitates engagement in other economic activities. [P3], a mother of three, states, "*What we grow finishes by Magh*

(January/February). After that, we must buy rice with money from the chickens, from the vegetables I sell, or from my husband's wage." The traditional occupation of agriculture/livestock is becoming secondary source [P10], a ward representative confirms this shift: "The land is not enough to feed a family for the year anymore. Everyone, especially the women, must find other work to fill the gap. The old self-sufficiency is gone."

Economic Diversification and the Rise of the Woman Entrepreneur: Faced with land constraints and food deficits, Tamang women are actively diversifying livelihoods, moving beyond fieldwork into commerce and skilled trades. The data shows Women are at the forefront of this micro-entrepreneurship. *[P4] runs a small tailoring shop: "After selling some of our land, I used a portion to buy a sewing machine. Now I stitch clothes for the community and for tourists on the hiking trail to Panauti." [P5] has leveraged the area's tourism: "We run a small homestay and sell gundruk, pickles and handmade souvenir products to trekkers." [P11], a community leader, observes: "The younger women are not waiting. They see the tourists passing through and are opening beauty parlors, souvenir shops, and tea stalls. Their income, though counted as 'supplementary,' is often what pays for school fees and medical bills."*

Modest Incomes and Strategic Asset Building: Monthly income data reveals modest earnings. However, strategic asset accumulation indicates improved household resilience and changing consumption patterns. Near-universal ownership of radios, TVs, and mobile phones signifies connectivity and access to information. The ownership of refrigerators and sewing machines points to investment in domestic efficiency and income-generating tools. *[P6] notes, "The refrigerator lets me sell milk and yoghurt for longer. The sewing machine was my first asset—it gives me independence." [P7], whose family runs a small lodge, explains: "Our income from the lodge and my husband's driving seems small month-to-month, but over years we built cemented house. It is slow, but we are building."* This is evidenced by majority of the respondents living in permanent (pakki) brick-and-cement homes.

Diversified Livelihood Strategies: Contemporary Tamang household operates a complex hybrid economy, blending residual agriculture with varied cash-based pursuits. *[P8] describes a typical multi-threaded livelihood: "In the morning, I tend the vegetables and buffalo. By afternoon, I am at my embroidery loom making items for a cooperative that sells to tourists. My husband drives a taxi, and my son sends money from Malaysia." This mirrors the data where remittances constitute a primary income for some of the households. [P12], a local official,*

summarizes: "The 'occupation' is no longer one thing. It is farming a small plot plus driving plus a wife's tailoring income plus a son's foreign remittance. The woman's role is no longer just in the field; she is a manager of this hybrid system, often running the small business that stabilizes the household cash flow." This shift is the core of the changing role: from sole reliance on communal, land-based production to active participation in and management of a diversified, monetized, and often globalized household economy.

Performing Non-agricultural Occupation: Most urgent driver of change is the severe economic pressure rendering traditional agriculture unsustainable. Participants describe a livelihood in crisis, trapped in a cycle of subsistence farming on ever-smaller, fragmented plots. *They speak of relying on outdated techniques, local seeds, and unpredictable rainfall, which yield "minimal gains" and leave families without a surplus to sell [P1, P4]. This vulnerability is catastrophically compounded by the wave of urbanization that attract many Tamang youths in non-agriculture sector like tourism, vocational skills-related occupation [P3, P10]. The economic calculus becomes clear: farming is a "hard and rough" practice with high investment and low return, pushing over majority of the community people to seek alternatives occupation mainly non-agriculture based [P1, P7].*

Shifting Social Prestige and Generational Aspiration: Running parallel to the economic push is a powerful social pull. A profound stigma has attached itself to traditional work. *Agriculture is now widely perceived as the domain of the "illiterate and backward," a label that carries deep shame and motivates a deliberate distancing from the past [P2].* The younger generation, in particular, internalizes this view, associating farming with low social prestige and a lack of civilization. *Their aspirations are now oriented toward "modernization and globalization," seeking identities as "civilized people" through education, city jobs, or foreign employment [P5, P8].* This generational shift in values means that continuing in traditional roles is not just economically difficult but also socially demeaning, creating a powerful psychological incentive for change.

Education, Migration, and Systemic Change: Routes out of traditional life are carved by education and migration. *Education is consistently cited as the key that unlocks new horizons, fostering "broader minds" and providing the credentials for government service, business, and other "prestigious" work [P11].* It enables a conscious break from the caste-based occupational destiny. Simultaneously, migration acts as a relentless engine of change. *Out-migration for work*

or education exposes individuals to new lifestyles, which they bring back, while in-migration into the valley introduces alternative cultural norms that lead to assimilation [P6, P9]. This is accelerated by systemic shifts like the move from a reciprocal parma labor system to a cash-based capitalist economy, which demands participation in the market and makes subsistence living obsolete [P]).

Transformed Lives, Families, and Community Fabric: Consequences of this occupational shift are deep and multifaceted, reshaping daily existence. *At the household level, lifestyles are transformed: handmade clothes give way to "fashionable readymade" garments, home-cooked meals are replaced by packaged foods, and aspirations shift toward luxury goods [P2, P9]. Family structures evolve, as large families—once an asset for farm labor—are redefined as an "economic burden" by parents in non-farm jobs, who instead invest in the quality education of fewer children [P6, P7]. Most profoundly, the very fabric of the community weakens. Traditional institutions diminish in influence, caste-based solidarity fractures into class-based stratification, and the out-migration of youth drains community of vitality, leading to an erosion of language, rituals, and shared cultural memory [P10, P12].* In essence, the changing role of Tamang women is a lens through which to view a total societal metamorphosis. It is a story of moving from a rooted, agrarian identity defined by community and tradition, to a more fragmented, cash-oriented existence where individual achievement and social mobility are paramount. This transition, driven by a convergence of economic pressure, social stigma, and new opportunities, is rewriting the narrative of household community life in the study area.

Discussions of Findings

Findings reveals a community structured by age and tradition yet showing signs of demographic transition. A significant 66.7 percent of respondents are of economically active age (15-59), forming the core workforce, while 33.3 percent are aged 60 and above, indicating a substantial elderly population. Family structures present a hybrid model: 46.7 percent live in nuclear families, yet 36.7 percent remain in joint families, a structure directly correlated with continued agricultural practice, as 36.7 percent of household heads engaged in farming reside in such arrangements. Patriarchal norms are firmly embedded, with 70 percent of households headed by men. Educational attainment is a critical bottleneck; only 17.5 percent of respondents have achieved an educational level of Higher Secondary (+2) or above, while 34.2 percent have either

no formal schooling or only informal literacy, highlighting a historical gap that constrains occupational mobility.

Economic data underscores a decisive shift away from the traditional agrarian economy. Only 17.5 percent of respondents cite agriculture or livestock as their primary occupation. This exodus is driven by land constraints and insecure tenure; 85 percent of female respondents do not own any land, and for those who do, holdings are small—74.1 percent cultivate plots of less than 5 ropani. Consequently, food insecurity is prevalent, with 87.5 percent of households unable to meet their food needs from their own land for more than 6 months of the year. In response, a diversified, cash-based livelihood strategy has emerged: 24.1 percent are now primarily engaged in business/trade, and another 31.7 percent in local wage labor or driving. This economic activity yields modest cash incomes, with 80 percent of respondents earning less than NPR 10,000 per month, yet enables strategic asset accumulation, such as 70 percent smartphone ownership and 50 percent ownership of items like refrigerators and sewing machines.

Women's roles are caught between persistent traditional burdens and emerging, yet limited, avenues of agency. Their labor in agriculture remains essential but narrowly focused, with 60 percent of their participation concentrated in sowing and weeding activities. Their control over major assets is minimal; only 10 percent have land or property in their own name. However, they exercise significant informal financial power, with 70 percent participating independently in savings/credit groups (Dhukuti). Decision-making authority within the household is sharply gendered: women are the primary final decision-makers for daily household expenses (55.38%) and children's education (47.52%), but men dominate decisions on agricultural activities (60.75%). Political engagement remains negligible, with 85 percent of women expressing no interest, underscoring a stark contrast between their growing domestic economic management and their exclusion from formal public power.

Quantitative data is contextualized by qualitative themes that explain the why and how of this transition. The primary driver is economic insufficiency: with most landholdings under 5 ropani and providing less than 6 months of food, agriculture is no longer viable as a sole livelihood, forcing the documented diversification into 6+ occupational types. This is compounded by a social revaluation of work; traditional farming is now stigmatized, pushing the younger, increasingly educated generation (only 4.2% have a Master's, but aspirations are high) toward "prestigious" non-farm jobs. The consequences are profound: the move to cash incomes (even if

modest, at NPR 4,000-8,000 for 50%) changes consumption and aspiration, while the out-migration of youth for work or education drains the community, threatening the cultural preservation that 70 percent of respondents currently uphold. Ultimately, the changing role of women is a key indicator of a broader societal move from a collective, subsistence identity to an individualized, monetized, and socially stratified existence.

Discussions of Findings

Changing roles of Tamang women must be contextualized within Nepal's broader socio-political landscape, characterized by profound ethnic diversity yet stark inequalities among its 142 caste/ethnic groups (NSO, 2024). As one of the largest indigenous nationalities, constituting 5.6 percent of the population, the Tamang are historically recognized as the original inhabitants of the Himalayan region but have faced systemic marginalization and exploitation, confining many to menial labor and limiting their access to resources (Aikman & Rao, 2023; UN, 2022; Tamang, 2019). The precarious position of Tamang women is shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities of gender, ethnicity, and class, with their status heavily demarcated by geography and economy (Luitel, 2018).

Empirical findings align with and deepen understanding of challenges identified in broader literature. The low educational attainment among respondents—with 34.2 percent having no formal or only informal schooling—mirrors national patterns of low literacy and educational exclusion documented among women from other marginalized communities like the Tharu (Tharu, 2019) and is reflected in the low national rate of female participation in teaching (MoES, 2021). Furthermore, the observed shift towards diversified livelihoods and women's significant involvement in informal finance (Dhukuti) resonates with studies on microfinance, which show that access to credit can improve income, consumption, and self-confidence among rural women, facilitating a move from traditional to non-traditional activities (Adhikari, 2020; Bista, 2022). However, this study also echoes cautionary notes, as such financial inclusion does not automatically translate to major asset ownership or political empowerment, and risks excluding the most vulnerable, a shortcoming noted in other microfinance analyses (Shrestha, 2021).

Crucially, this research addresses an identified gap by moving beyond macro-level analyses of Tamang social structure (Tamang, 2009; Bista, 2052) or generic studies of women's poverty. It provides a localized, nuanced examination of how broader forces—constitutional promises of non-discrimination (Constitution of Nepal, 2015) and progressive policies like the Fifteenth Plan

(2019-2023) that often lack enforcement—actively reshape intra-household dynamics. The findings reveal that while Tamang women exercise growing agency in daily finances and education, patriarchal control persists over major assets and agriculture, illustrating the complex interplay between policy intent, persistent marginalization, and women’s negotiated adaptation in their everyday lives.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study concludes that the changing role of Tamang women at the household level in Mahalaxmi Municipality-10 is a central feature of a broader socio-economic transformation. The findings reveal a community in transition, where households have moved decisively away from a primarily agrarian economy due to its diminishing viability, towards diversified livelihoods combining residual agriculture with various cash-based occupations. Within this shift, Tamang women have become indispensable architects of household resilience, expanding their roles from traditional labor to encompass critical management functions in finance, education, and micro-entrepreneurship.

Labor and expertise of women are fundamental pillars supporting the new household economy. The participants' own perceptions reveal a profound internal re-evaluation. Women often view their movement into non-farm activities as a pathway to greater dignity and modernity, expressing aspirational drives for roles offering social prestige. However, this exists alongside a dual consciousness of pride in increased agency and deep concern over the erosion of the Tamang language, rituals, and communal solidarity. Ultimately, the changing role of Tamang women is not a simple narrative of progress or loss, but one of negotiated adaptation, actively reshaping their economic contributions while consciously redefining their identity within a modernizing Nepal.

The journey toward greater agency requires strategically building upon existing strengths. First, formally organizing to amplify collective power is crucial; transforming the deep-rooted practice of Dhukuti (savings groups) into registered cooperatives can enable access to larger credit and launch collective enterprises. Second, proactively pursuing education and legal literacy is fundamental; understanding rights related to property and inheritance empowers women to initiate conversations about co-ownership and secure legal claims to household wealth.

Finally, championing cultural identity as an economic asset is key; integrating language, rituals, and traditional skills into livelihoods through culturally branded handicrafts or agro-tourism can

preserve heritage while creating a sustainable economic niche. Local development policy must actively foster an environment where women's transition to recognized stakeholders is accelerated. This requires implementing targeted, gender-transformative programs that address specific barriers, such as incentives for girls' education and livelihood schemes designed with women's direct participation as a core objective. Furthermore, the government should create bridges from informal to formal opportunity by simplifying processes to help women's groups register as cooperatives and by establishing legal aid clinics for joint land titling. Finally, leading systemic change is essential; this involves rigorously reviewing and reforming discriminatory local policies, partnering to establish cultural heritage centers, and creating skill-training partnerships to validate women's capabilities in the formal economy.

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