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Livelihoods of Hill Dalits in Kaski, Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the nature of occupational shift of Hill Dalit communities of Kaski District, Nepal. These artisanal communities have historically been caste based and marginalized. They are facing changes and pressures from social reform and the impacts of a market-based economy. The objectives of this research are to analyze the livelihood practices of Hill Dalits in Kaski District and to investigate how market-based adaptations have contributed to shifts in their socioeconomic position. This study is based on primary data collected from 72 purposively selected Dalit households. The data is analyzed by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings show changing patterns among Dalits in micro-entrepreneurship, schooling, informal wage work, and international labor migration. Developmental efforts such as public education and job training have supported these livelihood opportunities. The structural barriers, such as caste discrimination and limited institutional access still prevent upward mobility for Dalit community. The research found a gradual reconstruction of the definition of caste and caste-based occupation. Younger generations are increasingly rejecting inherited caste-based roles. Findings of this research on changing pattern of livelihood among Dalits provide a foundation for future investigations on social transformation. It may support academia by explaining social transformation among marginalized communities and how broader livelihood options support to social change.

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Introduction

This research examines how Dalit community's initiatives and the states' intervention role to uplift them. The study also observes at the current ways of subsistence and traditional caste-based practices followed by Hill Dalit communities. The groups collectively understood as Dalits in Nepal

have been recognized by the Nepal Civil Code of 1854 (Mulukhi Ain) as the untouchable community and historically functioned as the so called 'lower' caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy. As a result, Dalits in Nepal have been deep rooted in a system of structural inequity. Structural impact has been seen on them in case of low social position by caste, less economic chances as others and ability to own land and property, low access to health services and pursuit of education (Kalikotay, 2022). In Nepal, the term "Dalit" started to take the place in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It served as a rights-based identification for academics and activists. Cameron has discussed among Nepali Dalit activists regarding the use of "Dalit" as a political identity (Cameron, 2007). Scholars explain how "Dalit" entered Nepal's public debate and why activists rejected caste-based discrimination. They show that naming of Dalit is political rather than social. They also trace how the term spread across government, NGOs and the media, shaping policy debates (Bhattachan et al., 2008). These debates were based on right and self-respect. After the political landscape of 2006, Dalit focused reservation policies initiated by the government have made the community increasingly identity centered. The Legal Code of Nepal recognized the caste system. Dalits were socially and legally confined to traditional caste-based occupations, like, leatherworking (Sarki), blacksmithing (Bishwokarma/Kami), and tailoring (Pariyar/Damai). This practice isolates them from social engagement, respect and further advancement (Acharya, 2023). The aim of Nepal's political movement in different time and context was for social transformation. The political shift in Nepal, since the Maoist Movement of 2006 and the federal system by the 2015 Constitution has been to provide social justice and inclusion at first in Nepal's history. On the other hand, traditional caste-based practices have been influenced by modernization and migration. However, despite political and social changes Dalits have continued to face hardships in coping with new economic forms due to past marginalization (Adhikari, 2025), and acute social discrimination.

The overall goal of this research is to analyze how Hill Dalit communities, specifically the Damai, Kami, and Sarki castes have responded to these evolving economic and social situations. The research focuses on the Dalit community of Kaski district, where new strategies for survival are taking shape and caste-based forms of labour are breaking down. This sociological research examines how Dalits, through everyday life, reconstruct their social and cultural identities and resist structural exclusion. It also analyzes how they create new forms of agency in the face of hindering conditions. There are formal legal protections and specific inclusion measures for Dalit empowerment after 2006. However, Dalits continue to experience acute poverty, landlessness and underemployment (Bohara, 2025). Development programs often fail to consider the structural and cultural barriers that Dalits experienced since a long time. Many development programs are implemented by the state initiation that are dominated by elites and may not be responsive to or supportive of the Dalit communities (Adhikari, 2025).

Declining of traditional caste-based occupations may offer chances of upward mobility. Many Dalits in hill areas such as Kaski now rely on informal, skill-based work that offers limited social protection and upward mobility. Because caste, gender and class interconnected relations youth still face especially acute marginality (Timilsana, 2018). Caste discrimination persists in representation by education and work despite work and migration replacing traditional income sources. Marginalized communities continue to face significant challenges. Despite a growing form of studies on Dalit marginalization in Nepal (Kafle, 2023), most studies are either on Madhesi Dalits in the Tarai region or on urban Dalits in general. Similarly, there is an absence of research on Hill Dalits in rural hill areas. Research on caste-based exclusion and new adaptation practices is limited to examining livelihood from a sociological perspective.

Various studies done under Dalits often isolate social or economic factors without addressing how caste, gender, and institutional neglect contribute to Dalit marginalization (Singh, 2013). However, some studies examine how Dalits react to marginalization not only as victims but also as agents who transform their life paths through social activism, education and migration (Paudyal, 2022). Dalits were historically stigmatized as Shudra/Achhut by the state initiation and social perceptions. It restricted to stigmatized hereditary occupations in Nepal. Today, they claim justice, respect and identity against state and community that challenges these imposed roles and expands livelihood opportunities. Their focus includes on equal education, occupational diversification, formal work and migration. State policies such as reservations, scholarships and social protection have supported their mobility at present context. However, barriers like social discrimination and job insecurity remain significantly. In this context, present research analyzes and explore the Hill Dalits' livelihoods practices among in Kaski district. It addressing simultaneously, historical trends and present context to find out current livelihood practices. It investigates how their socioeconomic position has changed due to market-based adaptations and modern development activities to their means of subsistence.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Structuration theory in sociology, developed by Giddens, while explains the confrontation between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). It provides an interesting lens for exploring how Hill Dalits manage their livelihoods in constant of structural constraints at changing context of present scenario of globalization. The essence of this theory is that social structures are not fixed ever but are reproduced by human actions within societal relations. Dalit communities are reshaping their identity and livelihoods at present context. It depends against on resistance on traditional values and state policy. Dalits adapt and innovate new ways of subsistence for better lives despite exclusions. Key livelihood resources for Dalit communities are labour migration, education and income diversification at present context. Remittance has become a significant survival strategy for poor Dalit households. It enabling access to consumption, education and limited assets despite caste-based barriers and exclusion (Williams et al., 2020; Atreya et al., 2022). Education remains a transformative pathway for changing livelihood. Dalit youths of Nepal use schooling and scholarships to challenge traditional occupational stigma. It secure better employment opportunities though systemic gaps persist in a significant form (Neupane, 2017; UNICEF, 2023). Income from informal urban work and small enterprises provides short-term survival. However, often lacks stability and social protection cause of structural inequalities (Adhikari, 2023; NSO, 2024). Diverse opportunities may available through migration, education and income diversification can empower Dalits. However, rooted social discrimination and perceptions towards Dalit as for so called lower caste barriers persist and continue.

In Nepal, Dalits' access to key livelihood resources such as labour migration, education, and income has increased moderately at present context. These resources can play an empowering role in their lives and increase social reputation. The structural discrimination persistent historically and they experience daily often removes these resources meaningless to improve their livelihoods. This supports Giddens' theory that structures are shaped by behaviour. Other applications of structuration theory may be applied how individual perceptions and behaviours demoralize Dalit community even under state positive policy against exclusion. Therefore, Structuration theory provides a strong basis for understanding the everyday practices of Hill Dalits. It explains how they faced oppression from broader social structures and everyday activities of individuals.

Contextualizing Dalit Livelihoods in Nepal

Dalits in Nepal have long experienced of social, economic, political and cultural exclusion. Dalits have low access to land. Underdevelopment mainly persisted in rural areas of Nepal, where Dalits are historically situated has further created challenges of their livelihood. Their long experiences of marginalization and discrimination further limits options of livelihood for living. Major political transformation was possible with a decade of Maoist conflict in Nepal. These changes have made options for Dalits to establish their right through political reform and inclusive take part in development programs. However, issues of social exclusion also remain in a painful form. It prevents many Dalits from finding new ways of life to earn a living to their life sustaining and respectful life. Despite these challenges Hill Dalits have shown a new mode of life and adaptability in facing social and economic changes. The changes from a subsistence economy to a market-based economy has deeply affected their livelihoods as well. In the past, Dalits mostly worked in farming and caste-based occupation. Damai sew clothes, Kami format iron utensils whereas Sarki cobbled shoes in the past which were imposed professions which not found significantly at present context. Recent development initiatives which mainly based on have caused Dalits to engage in a wider range of seasonal migration and informal wage labour. The changing of occupational identity and options of work in the Kaski district is not only attributed to the decline of traditional occupations. It is also due to the crisis of agriculture in terms of less fertile land in hill, small size of land and loss of production in agriculture. Market based labour practices are driving a shift in the caste-based occupations (Acharya, 2023). Young generation of Dalit are choosing to work in cities and abroad. They rejecting the caste-based way of life.

In Kaski, Dalits are starting to employ market based coping strategies for their livelihood. However, their capacity to do so is still constrained by economic hardship and landlessness. They have low access on resources since history. Domestic and foreign migration is seen important to breakdown traditional caste-based occupation. Migration has become a response strategy to economic instability and poverty. Gautam et al. (2019) suggest by their research is that international labour migration as a Dalit coping strategy is both a symbolic resistance to caste-based labour restrictions and a strategy for economic gain and sustaining life. However, degree of changes, though this is limited among marginalized communities like the Dalit due to the cause of poverty and lack of education. The primary reason migrant Dalits are unable to profitably reinvest their remittances properly is the lack of institutional and community support and empowerment. Many of them have very little saved when they return to their villages. Dalit populations have not directly benefited from development initiatives due to a lack of engagement in investment strategies and supportive technology in modern context (Adhikari, 2025).

Livelihood Strategies: Continuities and Changes

Muluki Ain of 1854 has defined caste-based roles that believed significant control over the lives of Dalits. Caste based obligations and work stigmatized Dalit community. It secured by a ritualized caste-based hierarchy with the dependent economies of the upper castes. Parajuli (2012) claims that caste-based value changes in society and market based open and liberal practices have led to the rapid decline of the traditional skills of artisans in Kaski. Younger generations are increasingly left caste based traditional in these days. Despite the fact that older generations may be trapped in traditional occupations because they have no other options of livelihood cause of lack of education and market-based skill. Bhandari (2021) explored that rural and urban Dalits in Kaski have significantly different income levels. Urban Dalits only marginally surpassed rural Dalits in terms of financial literacy and funding availability. It is especially based in Bishwokarma households. He concluded that both groups remained in an economic dependency which impacted by low agricultural production and

high levels of debt (Bhandari, 2021). Migration and remittances provide an alternative option on which caste negotiations with the society are taking place. Dalit families use remittances to build safe houses and send their children to school. These remittances destabilize the existing local caste-based relations. However, Dalit workers report persistent social exclusion and indirect discrimination. It shows that caste stigma persists even after upward mobility through civil service reservation (Paudyal, 2022).

Development Interventions and Socio-Economic Change

Nepal's post-conflict development priority and strategies under federalism are committed to inclusive and participatory development by community initiatives. In practice, the development reflection for Dalits remained mixed and largely symbolic alone. Hidden exclusion has seen in practices among Dalit is persisted in a form of agency of development. However, Local Government Operation Act formally guarantees Dalit representation in local government planning and budgeting. (Adhikari, 2025). Development programs led by local governments are not effective. It ignores social obstacles to participation for Dalits. For example, Dalit youth are socially stigmatized and suffer from caste discrimination, which influences their ability to continue education or receive equitable treatment from teachers (Bishwakarma, 2017).

Several Dalit groups are redefining themselves in the wake of institutional and state led marginalization after 1990s. They protest against discrimination. A community of Dalit minority, the Musahars, is looking to merge with indigenous ethnic groups to overcome caste discrimination and achieve identity based governmental benefits (Singh, 2013). If we see sociologically this issues intersectionality as a method may be relevant in order to comprehend these processes of marginalization and adopting in new livelihood context. As a new finding of research on Dalit women, particularly those with disabilities, experience numerous exclusions in relation to maternal health, education and employment opportunities (Pariyar & Lovett, 2016; Timilsana, 2018). It denotes gender imbalance is persisted among them is another issue of research. For Hill Dalits in Kaski District, a variety of exploitative and oppressive experiences are persisted they have faced. Migration and informal labour markets which have positively impacted to their livelihood and economic subsistence. However, caste hierarchies and exclusion still exist despite an unclear change in development-based livelihoods.

Methodology

Rationale of the Study Area

The study areas of this present research are wards 16 and 19 of Pokhara Municipality in the Kaski District of Gandaki Province of Nepal. These wards were selected because a high number of Dalit populations are settled there. In this research specifically the Damai (Pariyar), Kami (Bishwakarma), and Sarki (Nepali) castes were selected. The selected groups of this research have all historically engaged in caste based artisanal occupation. They involve mainly in a variety of sectors like, leather working, blacksmithing, and tailoring, etc. which seems significantly change in these days. Over time, Kaski District has experienced rapid urbanization. In peri-urban areas like Pokhara, Dalits are shaped by social mobility and rural to urban migration. The lack of income from traditional occupation, low demand of artisan production and contemporary wider labour markets are forcing many of them to give up their traditional roles (Acharya, 2023; Palikhe et al., 2021). These transformations foster changes in their economic status compare to traditional occupation (Bhandari, 2021). In that regard, the areas which selected for this research provide a relevant research area to understand the restructuring of people's livelihoods in the changing context.

Data Collection Methods

This research which was conducted in January 2025 has utilized a mixed-method approach. This approach provides a comprehensive and interpretative data to analyze complexities of the issues of present research. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined to collect the multiple realities of Dalit livelihoods. In this research, quantitative data provided demographic and socio-economic patterns. It consisted of interviews, group discussions, and observations to explore lived experiences in depth. The sample size of 72 households was adopted through purposive sampling until data saturation was reached. This study may also provide greater generalizability than other studies by diverse, extreme and targeted cases of sample size. A senior member or head of household from each family agreed to participate for interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with them to obtain interpretative data. These interviews collected detailed information on demographic data, occupations, ownership, education and income sources which cover the research intention.

In addition to the interviews with respondents, the researcher examined how traditional skills were applied by them in different time by the group discussion. The study also investigated how these new skills they have at now shaped and transformed livelihood strategies over time. It further analyzed the patterns of livelihood diversification practiced by the community over the time. It also conducted key informant interviews with activists and senior members of the local community and local Dalit leaders. In which gave the study insights into processes at the community level and occupational histories of Dalit community. Field observation was valuable for this research. It permitted to the researcher firsthand assessment of the living conditions of Dalit of study area. It helps to examine the type of work activities and work environment and caste relations. It all made possible to enhance the diversity of the data based on research questions.

Results

Age and Education

The data provided here under in table 1 has clearly shows the differences in schooling between the Dalit generations in Kaski, Pokhara. All younger generations (18 to 30 years) are more educated. A considerable number of these younger generations have bachelors, SEE, and secondary degrees is significant. On the other hand, almost all of the older generations (46-60, 61+) either were uneducated or had only primary education. It shows changing priority of respondent over the time. The data shows recent improvements in access to school programs. However, it shows limited or no higher education access to most groups among Dalit family.

Table 1: *Schooling between the Dalit Generations*

Age Group	No Schooling	Primary	Secondary	SEE Passed	Higher Secondary	Bachelor and above	Total
18–30	5	6	7	6	5	4	33
31–45	6	9	5	2	1	0	23
46–60	4	3	1	1	1	0	10
61+	3	1	1	1	0	0	6

Note. Data are from field study (2025).

Table 1 shows a cross generational change in attainment for schooling. Out of thirteen respondents in the youngest age group (18–30), all 13 have achieved SEE or above. Three of them have also completed a bachelor's degree. It shows a higher level of attainment among younger generation. It may have different causes for the study. However, it denotes a clear priority on education among Dalit family at present context. In contrast, data shows that the older age groups have higher concentrations of "No Schooling" and "Primary" levels. These lower levels of education are especially common among those

aged 46 and above. It denotes that caste-based restriction among them and low emphasized on education among all communities.

Although higher education levels are still not accessible properly but data shows the availability of education has improved. This is particularly significant for younger generation. While these changes expect continued support by the program and motivation. It may promote graduates to move into skills-based labour markets. It is a positive sign for long term empowerment among them. The age and education of Dalit communities of the study area are affecting their shift from low paying manual labour and traditional patron-client relations to market-based relations. Younger respondent of study area is obtained higher education. Individuals particularly those over 46 years have only primary schooling or no formal education. It shows intergenerational gap in education and life sustaining activities. This disparity makes possible younger people to compete for skilled jobs. It may reduce on traditional caste-based roles among them.

Income and Labour Migration

Historically, Dalit community in Kaski found involved in artisans work in caste-based occupations. Now, it is in changing trend. However, with new socioeconomic factors like education, skill, migration etc. are changing their lives significantly. Because of declining demand for traditional skills and greater availability to market based opportunities Dalits shifted to labor migration as a form of alternative livelihoods. It accelerates to the migration among them. The relation between household income and migration in Dalit families is shown in the table 2 below.

Table 2: *Income for Households and Migration*

Income Group (NPR)	No Migration	Migration	Total
<10,000	6	2	8
10,000–15,000	16	5	21
15,000–25,000	14	9	23
25,000+	11	9	20

Note. Data are from field study (2025).

According to field data illustrate in table 2, more migrant members are found in households earning Rs. 15,000–25,000 and above Rs. 25,000. This shows that labour migration supports Dalit families to enhance income. It influences the middle-income level. The findings of this research equally support of research of Sharma (2024). Sharma has found that international labour migration gave short term financial support. However, productivity rarely influenced by remittance for broader economic change in Nepal. These findings differ from Atreya et al. (2022). Their study shows most Dalit households, especially those with young generation abroad in the family depend on remittance income for financial well-being and economic uncertainty.

Similarly, present study shows Dalit migrants in a specific area earn less than non-migrants. There are many reasons of impact of migration on remittance. The main reasons are unskilled work, low pay, less social protection, unstable jobs and high costs to go abroad. Significant labour migrant are involved in low paying and unsafe job. However, trend of labour migration is in increasing trend. It shows that migration is driven by the need to survive and sustainable livelihood. Migration does not always bring financial improvement. It may increase poverty and vulnerability in long term. Non-migrant Dalits do different labour jobs and small businesses. But they also face economic problems due to low income and making it hard them to meet daily needs. However, the selected sample may not fully reflect the different effects of labour migration in Nepal.

Development Processes Relating to Socio-Economic Conditions

The caste system has long caused socioeconomic exclusion for Dalit communities in Nepal. The system is rooted among Hindus in south Asia. Over the past 20 years, state efforts and initiations of civil society have aimed to reduce caste-based exclusion Nepal. Inclusion efforts became more visible in Nepal after the mid-1990s. It recognizes participation and inclusion in the development process. Several initiatives have been introduced to promote equity and empower to marginalized groups including Dalit. However, the impact of government initiatives has not seen significantly positive. It has been observed that caste-based discrimination cannot be removed without transforming social relations. Social security programs, inclusive education, vocational training and local governance participation are taken by the government under new constitution after 2015. However, the impact and reach of these interventions have been less effective. Table 3 below shows household-level data on Dalit perceptions of these efforts initiated by the government of Nepal. It emphasized respondent's views on the effects of development programs and their involvement.

Table 3: *Development Processes and Perceived Impact*

Development Intervention	No. of Households (out of 72)	Percentage
Enrollment in public schools with free school fees, textbooks/meals	50	69.7
Government's social security benefits (such as the Dalit allowance and the old age pension)	43	59.7
Involvement in local political units (ward/village committees) and engaged in party politics	18	25.0
Access to microcredit and cooperatives and self-help groups	22	30.6
Skill training by NGOs and local government	7	9.7

Note. Data are from field study (2025).

In the study area different development initiatives by the government have aimed to reduce the inequality and marginalization of Dalit groups. Data shows in the table 3, 59.72% of Dalit households benefit from government social security programs, such as old-age pensions and the Dalit income. These benefits mainly help the poorest and elderly. However, the impact in the study area is seen is weakened by limited coverage and irregular payments of allowances. This supports by the government earlier findings that such assistance is helpful but not sufficient for long term security. Support and social initiatives against caste discrimination are still needed. Due to the provision of free tuition, textbooks and food Dalit children's enrollment in public schools has risen to 69.72%. Despite this positive scenario, hardly 25% of respondents are active in local political organizations from this communities. This shows low Dalit influence in decision-making processes.

Only 30.55% of respondents reported access to self-help groups, cooperatives and microcredit to get upward their economic condition. Beside this small percentage, small loan sizes and high repayment pressure reduce their usefulness. This indicates a low impact of financial institutions among Dalits in the study area need to be more explored further. Such supports are helpful but is not enough for long-term sustainability. More assistance on skill, education and empowerment and anti-discrimination efforts are seen needed. Past research also shows that such conditions have temporary effects and limited personal impact. Only 9.12% of respondents accessed skills and training from NGOs or local governments. These programs are seen as moderately effective due to short duration and weak market linkages.

Main Income Source

Table 4 evaluates the relationship between primary sources of income and labour mobility in Kaski's Dalit families. In Dalit households, traditional caste-based occupations are declining. Families are diversifying income through remittances, wage labour, small businesses, and employment in local and foreign labour markets. By comparing which economic strategies are linked to domestic or international mobility. The table shows patterns of livelihood change. It emphasized migration as a key socioeconomic scheme whether or not households have migrated for work.

Table 4: *Main Sources of Income*

Income Source	No Migration	Migration	Total (N)	Percent
Foreign Remittance	11	10	21	29.2
Job	4	3	7	9.7
Small Business	9	7	16	22.2
Traditional Occupation	7	1	8	11.1
Wage Labour	16	4	20	27.2
Total	47	25	72	100.0

Table 4 illustrates the significant role of foreign remittances in enhancing the economic flexibility of Dalits. This is important when compared to their historical dependence on caste-based occupations. It shows them to continue to be a primary source of income for both migrant and non-migrant households at present context. Returnee migrants are also involved in different sectors of work. Remittances are often used as primary money to their income strategy in some families. The data has suggested relatively large number of non-migrant households reporting migration which either has small business or few governments work. Similarly, traditional occupations are going to be minimized. They were still informed by migrant and non-migrant households simultaneously. With much greater prevalence cause of modern education, migration and technology. This could be attributed to a resource-based or generational difference. Non-migrant households' high prevalence of wage work suggests they have more local labour force due to marginalization. However, labour mobility either abroad returnee or local internal migrants is primarily related to upward income strategies.

Livelihood Strategies of Dalit

Dalits in Kaski, pokhara, have long depended on caste-based artisan work on the basis of patron-client relations. It was based on caste hierarchy and restriction. However, as society has changed, the demand for these skills has decreased in this market-based economy. Dalit communities have had to look for other sources of income to their livelihood. In addition to patron–client labour relations, Dalits are engaged in informal wage labour, education, and overseas migration. They also participate in training programs and public sector work. Table 5 presents the adaptation of Dalit households. This refers to how they modify their livelihood strategies, social roles and economic practices in response to changing social and economic context in rural society.

Table 5: *Adaptive Livelihood Strategies of Dalit Households*

Main Adaptive Strategy	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Wage labour	29	40.3
Foreign labour migration	25	34.7
Self-employment	9	12.5
Traditional/artisan work	5	6.9
Involvement in politics, formal employment	4	5.6
Total	72	100.0

Table 5 explains the ways in which Dalit households in the research area are transforming their means of subsistence significantly. As per field data, 40.27% of the household depend on wage labor as compare to their dependency in patron-client relations. However, this indicates that a large number of Dalits still depend on low paying work. With 34.72% of household using remittance by foreign labor migration is the second most popular options of livelihood. This shows that a shortage of local employment opportunities leads many Dalits to look for work overseas as other entire Nepali people.

Few or 12.5% of family work for themselves through self-employment. Although the number is still small. However, it suggests that some Dalits are beginning independent work or small businesses. Only 6.94% of family engage in traditional or artisanal work to their livelihood. This indicates that caste-based employment, which was previously prevalent among Dalits is declining day by day. Few sizes of respondents, 5.50 percent of Dalits are officially employed or politically involved despite a gradual change in livelihood patterns. Overall nature of data shows further state assistance and community initiatives are required to improve their quality of life and self-respect. A significant change in mindset is required to improve the overall condition of Dalits community. It may possible by both from the community and the state initiations. The study shows that state initiatives are fundamental. Community support for fair labor practices is also needed. Data shows that social acceptance, vocational training associated with the job market and wider access to opportunities are equally essential.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that Dalit livelihood transition in Kaski is complex which is shaped by social agency, development interventions and socio-cultural constraints. The socio-economic importance of traditional caste related occupations, as endorsed by the Hindu social order and legal orders by Muluki Ain, 1854 is in rapidly declining trend. Descriptive and qualitative data from the research show that younger generations are increasingly changes their income strategies. They prefer labour migration, informal wage work and small self-run businesses. Traditional artisanal jobs like tailoring, blacksmithing and leatherwork are becoming less common. Few households mainly belong to senior age group now follow traditional caste-based occupations. This shows a major shift from caste-assigned jobs to market-based livelihoods. It also shows increasing agency as individuals adapt to emerging opportunities. Dalits in the study area used different survival methods through agency to survive with restrictive systems. The data of this research is significant as discussed by sociologist Anthony Giddens. The present condition of the Dalit community is shaped by social structures, state initiatives and the community's own activities. They are regarded as significant in terms

of the role of agency or community activities and the intention of freedom that they have stimulated to come out from traditional way of work.

A significant trend of Dalit households migrating overseas shows that external labor markets provide an escape from caste systems. On the other hand, development programs, including education and skill development, have all, in varying degrees, improved household strategies. The benefit of education is evident, as many households have improved school participation through public education. Shrestha (2022) criticizes national studies that conclude skill programs had little impact because the initiatives fell short on targeting and monitoring. Dalit groups are visibly resisting the caste-imposed limitations, claiming new identities and using group strategies to support their socioeconomic opportunities in life. Political participation is still very symbolic or minimum. It suggests a greater consciousness of rights of access on resources and political authority. Finally, the data suggests that migration and alternative forms of livelihoods allow some Dalit households to advance their income. These findings support with previous studies that have found similar patterns of migration and livelihood diversification among Dalits in other Nepali hill regions (Bhandari, 2021). The results of this study show how Dalit households in Kaski are moving away from their caste based traditional livelihoods. Yet, they are actively trying to improve their economic and social status through migration, education by young generation. While the adaptive strategies were observed during this research provide respondent involved in opportunities shaped by market. The study found that many challenges remain, and the success of adaptive strategies depends largely on income levels. Social and political structures remain fundamental factors in shaping the restrictions of Dalit livelihood adaptation is still prevail in the society. For instance, caste-based discrimination is seen to vary in the household depending on access to land, education, income, and secure employment. However, respondents in the study area show growing involvement in livelihood activities both within and outside the community as a form of labour migration. Their desire to leave artisan work is practiced since a long time. This shows a meaningful social change in how they experience and understand their livelihoods and respectful life. Dalit livelihoods by creating spaces in education, jobs and representation by the state policy is significance. Social awakening in a collective way is necessary to overcome stigma against Dalit. True emancipation of Dalit for their respectful life only be possible through effective policy and social acceptance. Symbolic representation through reservation in politics and bureaucracy by the government of Nepal, initiated after 2015 under the new constitution, fails to ensure Dalit emancipation without genuine reform.

Conclusion

Present study based on changing pattern of livelihood on Dalit community shows significant changes to their means of subsistence. Parton-client relations persisted in Dalit community are becoming less common at the study area. Dalit people are involved in businesses, formal education and labour migration slightly have all become essential to survival at present changing context. Mainly youth population of this community are not involved in caste-based occupation. It promotes their self-dignity and options of livelihood among them. Inclusive education and policy initiatives of government have produced freedom, skill and knowledge which make possible to meet opportunities from the formal sectors. However, structural obstacles based on caste discrimination restrict their mobility yet. Remittances from abroad and self-employment beyond caste restricted field provided solution of income scarcity and get freedom to negotiate work. The younger generation's emphasis on diversification of livelihood support mobility and social recognition. It may help minimize caste-based discrimination.

These results are explained by structural theory of Anthony Giddens. Dalits of study area use agency to modify their way of life at present modern context. However, structural factors like caste system, orthodox religion and societal relations continue to influence their decisions. It is also found that mainly from youth respondent they reproduce and reshape social structures through social interaction and relations with outer society. This situation shows how livelihood transformation is influenced by both community initiatives and larger systems. Caste based dependency is in declining trend in Hill Dalit households which support to expand options of livelihood. Now, they are looking for respectable lives compare to before with available options of livelihood and equitable opportunities.

Disclosure Statements

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