

Prosperity through Tradition: Traditional Skills and Level of Income Generation in Nepal

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Abstract

This study has attempted to explore how traditional skills, such as pottery, agriculture, and other caste/ethnicity-based practices, contribute to the livelihoods and income generation of individuals and communities in Nepal. The study has employed mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data was collected from the sampled population of 500 respondents, carefully and purposively selected with equal representation from five different groups—Kami, Damai, Sarki, Kumhale, and others—each comprising 100, by using a questionnaire. After analysing it, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with society stakeholders as ward chairs, ward members, teachers, professors and social activists in Dang Valley. The results offer mixed responses regarding the research issues. When asked about the use of leisure and sustainable source of income, the respondents were significantly positive and agreed with the issues. Regarding social identity of the people with traditional skills, the respondents had been experiencing social discrimination and unhealthy social response. The qualitative results present that traditional skills can be the perspective solution to unemployment. There is the need of preservation and promotion of such skills through inspiration, motivation and education at individual level, awareness and social inclusion at community level and favourable environments and effective policy initiatives at government level efforts so as to retain youth population within the country. While reviewing existing stock of literature in this field, it suggests that future research must explore how gender norms affect traditional skills practiced by men and women within different caste/ethnic groups.

Key Words: Traditional skills, income generation, livelihood, discrimination, inclusion

Introduction

Nepal is country of caste and ethnic diversity. So is the diversity in skills and crafts inherited from generation to generation as the identity of the caste and ethnicity. Such traditional skills play a crucial role in income generation in Nepal, contributing to the overall prosperity of individuals and communities (Lekakis, S.; Shakya, S. & Kostakis. V., 2018). Traditional skills

are generational in nature, and are automatically handed over from one generation to the next. Such skills are practiced rigorously as per local needs, so, are bound within specific geographical territory. These are preserved from generation to generation mainly due to spiritual belief, cultural heritage, rituals and prevalent knowledge. These skills, passed down through generations, encompass a wide range of activities such as handicrafts, traditional medicine, agriculture techniques, and cultural performances. These traditional skills not only provide a source of income but also preserve cultural heritage, promote community engagement, and foster a sense of pride and identity. As Nepal adapts to changing economic and social dynamics, it is important to recognize the value of traditional skills and create avenues for their promotion and utilization. This study primarily focused on the contribution of traditional skills to livelihoods and income generation across different caste/ethnic groups.

The Post-COVID-19 Nepal, has disrupted many sectors of the economy, including tourism and handicraft industries, which heavily rely on traditional skills for income generation. As a result, individuals and communities that depend on traditional skills for their livelihoods, have been greatly impacted. They have had to adapt and find alternative ways to sustain their income, such as exploring online platforms for selling their products or offering virtual cultural experiences (Yadav, Tripathi & Tripathi, 2022). Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted the interconnectedness between traditional skills, income generation, and social dynamics.

Traditional skills have their roots connected to sustainability themes such as: slow fashion, local production, recycling, and reuse, contributing to transitioning towards a more sustainable and resilient lifestyle, ultimately enhancing the well-being of communities. These skills, further, play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritages while simultaneously contributing to socio-economic empowerment and poverty alleviation (SDG 1 and 8), women's empowerment (SDG 5), and the improvement of production and consumption processes (SDG 12). Additionally, traditional skills offer resilient livelihood prospects particularly benefiting destitute and marginalized families (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Skill development through basic education and secondary education in line with the social, economic and technology rationales are imperative. This will help to produce the quality graduates who can engage themselves in self-employment. Such skill development efforts must

be linked with the economic and social development policy. Until and unless skill development is directly linked with the economic development and cultural traditions, it does not work in isolation (Lamsal & Bajracharya, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Nepalese economy has been disrupted due to the lack of indigenous based production. Traditional skills promote many sectors of the economy, including tourism and handicraft industries.

Objectives

General objective of the article is to assess the significance of traditional skills in livelihoods and income generation of individuals and communities in Nepal and the specific objectives are:

-to explore the factors that contribute to the continuation of traditional skills for income generation

-to analyse opportunities and challenges for promoting traditional skills in Nepal

Literature Review

According to the definition of decent work by ILO, it is the opportunities to have productive work that offers a just income in a secure workplace environment with social protection. It also promotes personal development and social inclusion, freedom to expression, freedom to organize and participate in the decision making and ensured gender equality. Within the existing policy framework, there may be insufficient employment opportunities in Nepal's domestic economy (ILO,2016).

Cottage industry of eastern Nepal, based on traditional textiles and basketry, promoted economic benefits, environmental conservation and contributed to the development of local, grassroots through women participation. This paper explores the effectiveness of such projects for achieving the defined objectives. The paper also discusses some of the important factors associated with traditional skills, as gender, raw materials, institutions, equipment, product development and marketing, training, accessibility, government policies and sociological and religious aspects (Dunsmore, 1998).

Most of the households, in Pahari village of Badikhel, Godawari-4, are engaged in making and selling various bamboo and cane goods. The materials required for this are produced locally. Pahari women keep themselves engaged in making, marketing, and preservation of their traditional skills. They lack government support and incentive to preserve their skills, but are doing just for the sake of continuing their traditional practices. Such skills have positive impacts on rural economy, solve unemployment problems and contribute to the protection of environment. (Sherpa, 2024).

Dalits employed in traditional skills are associated with low social status and low pay, so, are drastically deviating from their original occupation. The occupations are declining because of two main causes: it has been greatly affected by modernization, and; most importantly, its low social prestige. Most Dalits discard their occupation, although it has handsome earning even at the present time (Parajuli, 2009).

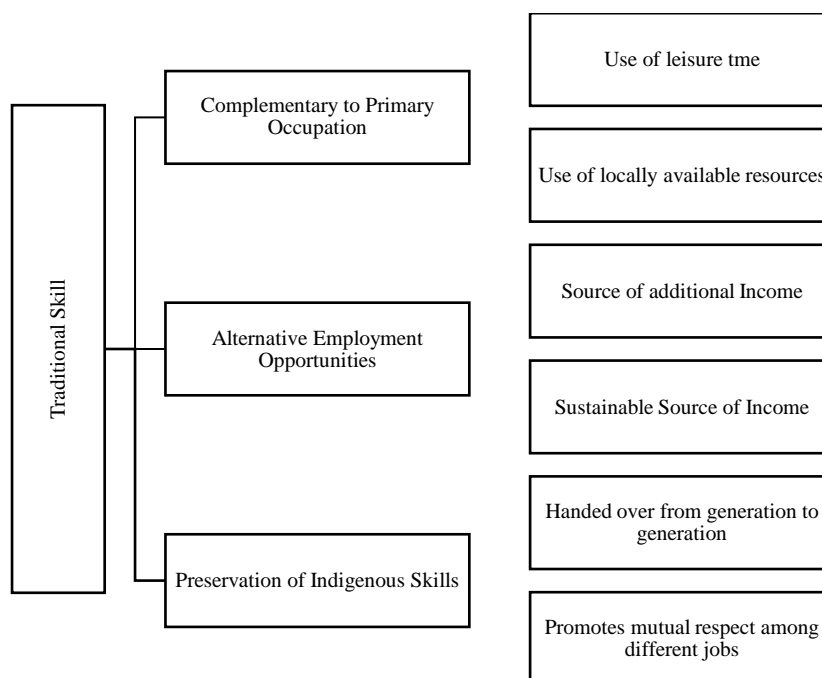
Entrepreneurship offers creative platform for skill development and capacity building that enables traditional practitioners to adapt their skills to contemporary market demands while maintaining the essence of their product. So, embedding traditional skills within entrepreneurship can be a potent strategy for economic empowerment and cultural preservation. Nepal has its long history of arts and crafts as traditional skills. Similarly, wood carving, pottery making, stone carving have long been practiced in Nepal and have been passed down for centuries from generation to generation and are the source of income for their lives. The survival of culture and tradition is threatened by lack of interest and lack of strong base among the younger generation. If promoted and practiced, these activities in tourist areas will lead to tourism development and can be the best alternative employment (Poudel, & Tiwari, 2020).

The caste-based occupation, predominated by traditional skill, would be the main source of income among the Dalit communities until a decade ago, but it has been gradually disappearing over the years. Global wave of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization offer diversities of livelihood. As a result, young and educated Dalits adopted shifting occupational practices of livelihood, so that they can get rid of socially discriminatory practices and improve their quality of life and the welfare of their families (Acharya, 2023).

In Nepal, the informal sector includes various traditional occupations that have been practiced for generations and account for a large proportion of total employment in the country. The traditional skills transfer system from senior craftsman to the beginner is a deeply rooted practice in most of the traditional occupations. In this regard, the elder member of the family teaches skills and mentors the younger members. Even in the modern (non-traditional) occupations like metal fabrication, car mechanics, and fast-food businesses, similar practices can be observed. However, skilled workers or crafts people of these occupations often share their complaints that society does not value their skills. They also share their lack of knowledge about the current provisions of training and skills certification. Furthermore, this skills acquisition process is not included in the mainstream television education system of Nepal (Baral, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework of the present study offers a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between traditional skills and income generation within the Nepalese context. The study scope includes varieties of traditional skills that generate income fostering rural livelihood and it examines the factors influencing income generation. The study is concerned with market dynamics, socio-economic impacts on individuals and communities, and traditional skills-based income generation programmes in Nepal. It serves as a guide for systematically analyzing the relationship between traditional skills and income generation, offering insights into opportunities and challenges for promoting sustainable livelihoods, preserving indigenous skills with utilisation of locally available resources in Nepalese context.



Methods and Materials

Based on the research objectives, scope, and resources available; the study employs mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data set. Quantitative data is collected through pre-structured survey questionnaire distributed among the key stakeholders. Purposive sampling technique is used as per the study demands. Qualitative data, collected through in-depth interviews with concerned individuals, is analysed to justify and strengthen the quantitative results. The methods and materials employed in the study, as such, aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of the association between traditional skills and income generation in Nepal.

Data Collection and Analysis

Based on the nature of data (quantitative and qualitative), it is collected in two phases. Quantitative data was collected in the first phase. Structured questions with predefined response options were used to gather data from sample population. Precise and statistical analysis of quantitative data supported for generalization, comparisons and correlations between variables to draw comprehensive output. For quantitative data, the study includes carefully and purposively selected sample of 500 respondents from Dang District of Lumbini Province, with equal representation from five different groups—Kami, Damai, Sarki, Kumhale, and others—each

comprising 100 respondents. The balanced approach employed in sample selection, ensures a comprehensive perspective, reflecting the diversity within the society.

After analysing quantitative data, qualitative data was collected to rationally justify and strengthen the quantitative output. Interview, as one of the efficient, and effective qualitative data collection procedure, has been employed to draw comprehensive understanding through valuable insights into the research issues. For this purpose, 10 respondents from local government, social leaders and officials from District Office of the Cottage and Small Industries of Dang were selected in order to collect qualitative data through the interview by using open-ended questions, which helped respondents to express their perspectives and experiences in-depth.

Limitations of the Study

Considering its caste/ethnic diversity, the study is delimited to Dang Valley of Dang District, in Lumbini Province. The study site is selected as per the study objective. The study is again confined to the traditional skill-based population in Dang Valley. Moreover, the research intends to explore different dimensions of traditional skills.

Ethical Consideration

Dignity, rights and sensitivity of all the participants involved is well respected. Obtaining informed consent from all the participants in any research is crucial during data collection.

Results and Discussions

Table 1. Respondents' Perceptions Regarding Traditional Skills

Respondents' Views	Skill-Based Caste/Ethnic Group										Total		
	Kami		Sarki		Damai		Kumhal		Others		N	%	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Use of leisure time	60	40	90	30	20								
Use of locally available resources	20	40	80	70	30								
Source of additional Income	70	80	90	75	79								
Sustainable Source of Income	80	80	90	70	68								
Handed over from generation to generation	20	10	90	60	54								
Promotes mutual respect among different jobs	20	10	60	80	72								
Total											500		

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

The above table presents respondents' perceptions regarding traditional skills. Regarding the use of leisure time, 90 out of 100 Damai opined that they have been fully utilising their leisure time in highly productive manner. Other caste people found it less useful in terms of time. When asked about the use of locally available resources, Damai and Kumhale were found highly profitable although Kami said that they had to buy raw materials from market. A high majority of the respondents agreed that their skills had been the source of additional income. Again, majority of the respondents accepted that their skills had been generating income in a sustainable manner. At last, the table presents that, only 10 of kami and 20 of Sarki agreed the statement that practicing local skills promotes mutual respect among different jobs. Majority of the remaining studied caste answered positively.

Table 2. Respondents’ Views about Traditional Skills and Social Identity

Respondents’ Views	Skill-Based Caste/Ethnic Group										Total		
	Kami		Sarki		Damai		Kumhal		Others		N	%	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Social Discrimination	100	100	100	100	20	40							
Unhealthy Social Response	100	100	100	100	90	95							
Limited Access to Raw Materials	100	80	30	60	55								
Technological Development	90	85	50	90	60								
Decreasing Demand	70	80	10	80	55								
Youth Drain	95	95	70	80	85								
Total											500		

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

Table 2 presents the fact about the people with traditional skills and their social identity. When asked about social discrimination based on the skill, all of Kami, Damai and Sarki had been experiencing high level of social discrimination. Out of total 500 respondents, 485 responded that there exists unhealthy social response based on the skill hurt them. When they were asked about the effects of technological development on local skills, Kumhale and others had expressed that their work had been adversely affected.

Conclusions

Traditional skills have been generating income in a sustainable manner and helping to preserve local knowledge on one hand, and on the other such skills are crucial to solve unemployment problem. A high majority of the respondents agreed that their skills had been the source of additional income. A heavy majority responded that there exists unhealthy social response based on the skills and it hurt them to great extent. When they were asked about the effects of technological development on local skills, Kumhale and others had expressed that their indigenous technology had been adversely affected. If they are promoted and preserved through government level efforts and favourable environments with effective policy initiatives, such

skills can be instrumental to employment generation and retain youth population within the country.

Educational Implication

In Nepalese context, technical education promotes traditional skills. It ensures the self-employment and corrects balance of payment.

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