

Changing Livelihood Strategies of Indigenous People : A Case Study of Raji Community at Ghatgaun in Surkhet District, Nepal

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This article reports an analysis of the changing livelihood strategies of the Raji indigenous community located at Ghatgaun of Chaukune Rural Municipality in Surkhet, Nepal. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study used a variety of data and information obtained from primary as well as secondary sources along with carrying specific analysis and necessary generalization. The findings suggest that lower economic background and the difficulty to sustain in the changing scenario enforced Raji people to adopt new livelihood patterns including the initiation of salaried jobs, small scale of business and labour migration particularly to different parts of India. In addition to this, gradual changes in family structure, marriage pattern, birth rituals, dancing patterns, language uses, dress pattern, religious practices and the adoption of modern medicinal treatment during sickness instead of superstitiously relying on

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JOURNAL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer), 2022
Peer Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed International Research Journal

Dhami-jhankris (witchdoctors) were evident due to the influence of modern diversified culture. Educational opportunities for women and their increasing involvement in earning activities have contributed in the process of women empowerment. Providing adequate educational and occupational opportunities as well as modernizing Raji traditional products along with exposing such products in the modern market could further bring the Raji indigenous community in the process of development.

[**Keywords** : Raji, Indigenous knowledge, Culture, Livelihood strategies, Modernization]

1. Introduction

Raji people are one of the most endangered ethnic groups and economically backward and neglected indigenous communities in Nepal (IRIN, 2008; UNRCHCO, 2012). Like many other indigenous groups of people in Nepal, Raji people do have unique history. Their ancestors were the original inhabitants of the land and survived by hunting animals, gathering fruits, collecting edible plants, honey and forests herbs, practising the shifting cultivation, fishing, ferrying people across the rivers and many more. Originally, they spent nomadic life. But different changes took place when the traditional lifestyle and occupation no more remained adequate for survival leading many people to be semi-nomadic and many others involve in sedentary activities such as husbandry and farming. In the process of feeding the family by collecting the edible plants and hunting the animals in the surrounding forests along with fishing in the nearby riverbanks, they got scattered in the districts of Western Nepal. Their shifting to semi-nomadic lifestyle brought numerous challenges a range of new issues further leading for many changes in the entire pattern of livelihood.

Livelihood, a means of gaining a living, is more than merely the synonym of income as it directs the attention to how living is obtained, not just the net results in terms of income received or consumption attained (Ellis, 2007). The strategies of livelihood operate at both the level of household and individual either through continuity or modification of socio-economic activities maintained for survival. The livelihood patterns of people can also be found either in the form of the continuity of the traditional activities and occupations or the modification in them. Chhetri (2006) argues that several internal and external factors impinge upon the livelihood strategies of people. Some of these factors operate at local while others at national and even global level.

In the context of the Raji, residing in different districts of Western Nepal (Bennett, et al, 2008), the traditional living styles and patterns have been modified for the adoption of newer ones although the degree of changes is quite different in urban areas with high literacy rates compared to such changes in the villages with low literacy. For instance, the Raji people of Ghatgaun have changed their way of living, belief systems and attitudes due to the influence of globalization, urbanization, the system of education, scientific advancement, high level of production and consumption and the contiguity of other caste and people. The Rajis of villages with both low literacy and low income and of course less access to natural resources are dependent on agriculture and allowances provided by the local government for sustenance. Likewise, although majority of Rajis hold citizenship certificate very few hold land ownership certificates despite their long settlement on ainali. Despite the positive changes in the Rajis, there is equally the risk of the loss of their indigenous knowledge, skills and specific patterns that got to be urgently documented along with utilizing this knowledge for their economic advancement and reorganization.

The objective of this research is to explore how livelihood patterns of Raji community located at Ghatgaun of Chaukune Rural Municipality, Surkhet, Nepal have been changing allowing the adaption of new patterns in the changing context thereby enforcing the changes even in the indigenous knowledge system.

2. Literature Review Related to Raji Community

Basically, livelihood has been defined as a sustainable means of living not only for the present generation but also for the future. Robert Chambers (1995), for example, proposed the subsequent composite definition of sustainable livelihood arguing it comprising the capabilities of the assets (stores, resources, claims access) and activities required for living. Chambers (1995) states that the realities of poor people are local, complex, diverse and dynamic. Their poverty is just one of the aspects of deprivation since besides it there are multiple dimensions of disadvantage, ill-being, the sense of social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonal deprivation, powerlessness and of course humiliation. For Chambers only the sustainable livelihood could deal with their poverty and justifiably redistribute the resources, proper prices, payments, health facilities, and also abolish the restrictions. It could contribute in

diminishing the poverty through diversified livelihoods and enhance sustainability.

Francis (2000) accepted that “livelihood deals with people and their resources like land, crops, knowledge, cattle and social relationship. It is also creating and embracing new opportunities. While gaining a livelihood or attempting to try to do so, people may at an equivalent time, need to deal with risks and uncertainties, like erratic rainfalls, demanding resources, pressure inland and kinship network” (p. 35).

Ellis (2000) states that only farming for many households cannot sufficiently provide a means of survival in rural areas. Hence, many remote households could be found depending on other various portfolios and activities instead of just relying on their agricultural productions. Engagement during a diverse portfolio of activities also means nurturing the social networks of kin and community that enable such diversity to be secured and sustained. It replicates how livelihood diversity has both economic and social dimensions and how it must be approached in an interdisciplinary way.

Department for International Development (DFID, 2001) made a valuable contribution by developing principles, framework also as a way for livelihood studies. It emphasized on the subsequent six principles to pursue sustainable livelihood studies :

- People at the middle of development instead of the resources they use or the governments that serve them.
- Adoption of a holistic view which attempts to realize a sensible understanding of what shapes people’s livelihoods and the way the varied influencing factors are often adjusted in order that they produce more beneficial livelihood outcomes.
- It emphasizes the dynamic nature of livelihoods because it seeks to know and learn from change in order that it can support a positive pattern of change and help mitigate negative patterns.
- Specialize in the approach towards strength and opportunities instead of problems and wishes.
- Emphasis on macro-micro link policies and institutions to the livelihood options of communities also as individuals.
- The key approach concerns livelihood with sustainability.

The sustainable livelihood framework developed by DFID helps to analyze the livelihoods basically because it provides a checklist of important issues and sketches the link among one another. It also draws attention to the processes and emphasizes multiple interactions between the factors that affect livelihoods. At the same time, it also emphasizes on the feedbacks that are likely between transforming structures and processes and therefore the vulnerability context and livelihood outcomes and livelihood assets. The emphasis is given on both quantitative and qualitative data for the analysis of sustainable livelihoods at local level. Such data could be collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussion, household surveys and resource assessment.

3. Methodology

This study is based on quantitative and qualitative data with both descriptive and exploratory research design to achieve the purpose of the study. I focused more on exploring the continuity and change in livelihood strategies of Raji people in the study area by using thick description. The same process of thick description had been used by Clifford Geertz while conducting ethnographic research in Balinese culture (Geertz, 2017; Ojha, 2021). Employing purposive sampling, 37 households were selected as samples for this study from Ghatgaun of Raji community. Household survey was done with structured and semi-structured questionnaires. Likewise, key informants' interviews and field observation methods were also used to obtain the necessary information.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

There are several changes within the livelihood of Raji over the past few decades. Although they had had lived doing boating, fishing and agriculture for decades and centuries often use the indigenous tools as bows, traps, hooks, boats along with doing agriculture and husbandry. In terms of cattle rearing they kept cow, ox, pig, hen, goat and sheep. These days too such animals could be found in their villages to some extent. However, their economy is passing through the transitional phase as many changes have taken place and different other occupational patterns have been initiated such as wage labour, business activities, horticulture and salaried services.

Change is, in fact, a universal phenomenon that could be observed in any society and at any time. Infrastructures like road, school, health post, modern education, occupation are the important

factors for inviting changes on the livelihood pattern of the Raji people of the study area although some traditional occupations have also been practiced to some extent such as fishing, handicraft making and agriculture with farming. Wage labour, business, services, horticulture etc. have supported them for adjustment in the present changing circumstances.

Table-1 : Population Distribution of Selected 37 Households

Age Group	Sex	Total
0-5	F	7
	M	11
6-10	F	6
	M	18
11-15	F	24
	M	16
16-20	F	8
	M	13
21-40	F	27
	M	28
41-50	F	11
	M	13
51-60	F	8
	M	8
61-65	F	-
	M	1
65+	F	4
	M	2

Source : Field Survey, 2022

The above table shows the distribution of population on the basis of age and sex in selected 37 households.

Table-2 : Distribution of Physical Infrastructures

S. N.	Description	Sources	No. of HHs	Percent
1.	Drinking water	River	22	59.45
		Kuwa	10	27.02
		Hand pump	5	13.51
		Total	37	99.98 (100)
2.	Type of house	Kachhi	37	100
		Total	37	100

3.	Types of toilet	Kachhi	36	97.29
		Pakki	1	2.70
		Total	37	99.99 (100)
4.	Source of communication	Radio	8	21.62
		No	29	78.37
		Total	37	99.99 (100)
		Mobile	37	100
5.	Type of fuel for cooking	Wood	37	100

Source : Field Survey, 2022

The table replicates that 59.45 percent of the households were dependent on river for drinking water while 27.02 percent were on kuwa, 13.51 percent on hand pump. 100 percent houses were kacchi and made by wooden. Likewise, 97.29 percent toilets were kacchi while only 2.70 percent were pakki. 100 percent HHs used wood fuel for cooking. 21.62 percent HHs used radio for information while 100 percent used mobile to ex-change information or for two way communication.

Table-3 : Religion and Ethnicity

Religion	Ethnicity	Types of Janajati	No. of HHs	Percent
Hindu	Janajati	Marginalized	37	100
Total			37	100

Source : Field Survey, 2022

As replicated in the given table all the households were janajati and were following Hindu religion.

Table-4 : Distribution of the Respondents on the Uses of Traditional Dress

Response	Households	Percentage
Yes	5	13.51
No	24	64.37
Occasionally	8	21.62
Total	37	100.00

Source : Field Survey, 2022

As shown in the above table, out of the 37 sampled households only 13.51 percent were found using traditional Raji dresses while 64.37 percent said that they didn't have such dresses. Only 21.62

percent stated of using traditional custom during special occasions such as feast and festivals.

Raji people have their own traditional custom and dress pattern. By their custom, men wear Bhoto (shirt) and kachhad while women wear Cholo and Gunyo. However, the changes have taken place in this pattern these days as Rajis rarely use these traditional dresses. Only some old people could be found wearing them while majority of them could be found wearing modern dresses. Even some of the young people from Raji community do not know about their traditional customs allowing us to predict that in near future Raji will forget their traditional customs under the influence of modernization and other cultures.

Table-5 : Distribution of Respondents on the Treatment Pattern of Illness

Treatment	10 yrs back	%	Present	%
Hospital / Clinic	8	21.62	35	94.59
Dhami / Jhankri	29	78.37	2	5.40
Total	37	100.00	37	100.00

Source : Field Survey, 2022

The above shows that out of 37 households only 21 percent of Rajis were found taking the treatment from hospital and clinic 10 year back but at present the number of Raji that take the medical facility increased up to 94.59 percent. Similarly, 78.37 percent of Raji used to follow traditional ways of treatment from Dhami and Jhankri. At present only 5.40 percent consult Dhami and Jhankri. They too follow the suggestions of the doctors in the hospitals even after visiting Dhami and Jhankris. Most of them do have the knowledge of modern medicinal treatment.

Table-6 : Distribution of Raji Households on the Basis of Occupational Involvement

Occupation	10 yrs back		Present	
	HH	%	HH	%
Agriculture	19	51.35	12	32.43
Service	2	5.40	5	13.51
Business	0	0.00	5	13.51

Seasonal migration labour	2	5.40	7	18.91
Daily wage labour	4	10.81	6	16.98
Fishing	10	27.02	2	5.40
Total	37	100.00	37	100.00

Source : Field Survey, 2022

The above table shows that before 10 years nobody from Raji indigenous community involved in business but at present 5 persons (13.51%) from the Rajis were found doing business. Similarly, in the past 51.35 households were found practising agriculture as their main occupation but now the number came to be only 32.43. This number shows that Rajis were gradually changing their traditional occupation and interests towards other occupations such as in the past 5.40 people of Rajis were found in service but at present the scenario has changed and about 13.51 percent Rajis have joined services though their involvement is in officer and lower position. In the same way, 27.02 percent people were engaged in fishing in the past but nowadays only 5.40 percent people have been relying on fishing. Likewise, 5.40 percent had involvement in seasonal labour migration while 10.81 percent in wage labour in the past while it has been increased up to 18.91 and 16.98 respectively.

Traditionally, the main occupations of Raji are agriculture, fishing and boating. But nowadays, the Rajis of the study area are found leaving their traditional occupations. They are more interested in other activities like salaried services, foreign employment, business activities and the like. However, along with the changes of time, Rajis have been involving in other occupational activities.

Table-7 : Distribution of the Responses on the Basis of Continuing Traditional Occupation and local knowledge

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	21.62
No	29	78.37
Total	37	100.00

Source : Field survey, 2022

Out of 37 sampled households, 21.62 percent respondents responded that they were still continuing their traditional occupations. But 78.40 percent were found leaving their traditional occupation and adopting other occupations. Although 21.62 percent of households were continuing their traditional occupation, the

income from traditional occupations such as agriculture, fishing and boating remained insufficient to meet the basic requirements. In the survey, on the question why income from traditional occupation was insufficient to meet the basic needs of family, the respondents gave diverse opinions.

In the past, Rajis involved in hunting and gathering of wild animals, birds, fruits and roots for survival. The elderly Raji people stated that they used to live near the dense forest for hunting the wild animals and collecting wild fruits, yams, herbs and pant roots consistent with the available time basically during the scarcity of the food.

Fishing is a dominantly practiced survival strategy of Rajis. The Key informants said that they used to catch the fish from the river and consume. Both male and female with their children used to visit the river for fishing although male was supposed to be the primary agent of collecting food such as by fishing at Bheri and Karnali rivers. Females and young children used to go for fishing at small streams. The study also found them involving in fishing. However, the purpose has been changed. It is because the Rajis were found selling fish in the nearby market and buying necessary spices, kerosene, vegetables, oil, salt, rice and other things for daily use.

In the past, Raji people were dependent on subsistence farming for their survival. They cultivated different items within the sloppy land. They produced paddy, maize, wheat, millet and green vegetables for their own consumption by using traditional tools and techniques like Halo, Juwa and Kodalo. In the changing scenario, it came to be insufficient for 12 month's sustenance. The key informants informed that within the production system male ploughed and dug the land. But harvesting was done by both male and female particularly during the scarcity of labourers. At the same time, within the family and relatives they exchanged labourers mainly during agricultural peak hours which are known as parma and saghaune.

The Rajis of the selected households were found keeping livestock for different purposes such as cow for milk, ox for fertilizer, goat, pig and chicken for and also for offering to gods and goddesses. Rajis also are practising a lot of change in their adaptive strategies from the last decade. In the past, Rajis involved in hunting and gathering, fishing, handicraft making, subsistence agriculture with farming as adaptive strategies for their survival. However, the changes in their socio-cultural and economic environment due to the doorway of developmental infrastructure brought changes in their

livelihood. Therefore, with the changing of time Raji implement new adaptive strategies like wage labour, horticulture, service, business and market-oriented farming which are discussed intimately under the subsequent sub-headings.

Wage laboring may be a common practice among the landless and small farmers within the study area. They sell their labour to the owner of the village during the agricultural season as ploughing and digging, transplanting, harvesting and threshing the food products. I found the males above 15 years of age and below 70 ploughing and digging the field while transplanting and weeding were female tasks. Harvesting was generally done by both male and female. Most of the people were small landholders and their products were not sufficient for annual consumption. Hence, the members of those households were found encompassing construction and other forms of activities.

Key informants interview and observation were the techniques used to gather information on the changes occurred in socio-cultural and economic practices among Rajis. Along with the process of urbanization and modernization of their dwelling areas, they got the opportunity of becoming familiar with certain modern facilities and amenities of recent life thereby developing their personality. Mainly their economic status rose due to Social Security and services that focused on the allowance supporting better education and health facilities.

They have also begun to be more economical even while celebrating the feast and festivals such as by stopping unnecessary amount of cash and sacrificing fewer pigs and chickens in the name of gods and goddesses. Collaboration and cooperation also could be found in their community.

Traditionally, the houses of Raji were found hut type in a shape called "chhapro". These were one-storeyed made from wood. The walls were of choya plastered with mud and therefore the roof made from khar. But nowadays this chhapro is almost disappeared. All the houses of Raji at Ghatgaun were found modern build and permanent sort particularly as the result of the programmes like Social Security and modernization. Before the introduction of the Social Security allowance, the life-style of Raji was very poor. They did not work whole year in the field. But after providing Social Security allowance the living standard of Raji of the study area grew up.

The financial condition of Raji has become better after the availability of infrastructures of development in their settlement

area. Rajis have improved economically after the introduction of the Social Security policy. After the urbanization of this area, one regional hospital and lots of other paying clinics are established. This provides the modern means of treatment to Raji. Therefore, the modernization has positive impact on their health status as it ended their compulsion of depending only up on Dhami and Jhankri for treatment.

5. Conclusion

The Raji people of the study area are under the process of shifting from agro-based to non-agro-based livelihood patterns. The household assets of this community have greatly influenced the method of adoption of a new strategy or modification and eradication of traditional occupation. The households with comparatively better access to the capital to pursue livelihood are adopting the influence of modernization in their areas more easily than the households who have less access to the assets. With the development of surrounding spaces, the people of particular space need to change their way of life to adapt the changing environment. People also derived their livelihoods from agriculture-based activities. Mainly land was the significant household asset for crop production (like paddy, wheat, etc.). However, agriculture wasn't sufficient for them even in the past and thus they had to hook into other activities besides agriculture such as fishing, handicraft making, hunting and animal husbandry. Nowadays they have been earning also as carpenter, wage labourer and job holders. Under the influence of urbanization and modernization, they have undergone rapid modification causing leaving their traditional occupations and adopting urban-oriented non-agricultural activities.

Today females are engaged in domestic and agricultural works while males are supplement part. Mostly males are engaged in outside of their homework privately and government services, wage labor, fishing, building construction, decorating the house etc. Foreign labour migration has been taking place although the differences of livelihood strategies even within Raji community have been determined by the educational level and orientation. For instance, the educated people prefer doing salaried jobs while uneducated are relying on daily wage labour. The changes in language use, cultural performances, marriage pattern, birth celebrations, dancing patterns, dress patterns and medicinal

preferences instead of totally relying on dhams and jhakris are also the influence of the process of modernization.

Along with socio-cultural changes, family structures have also been changing such as the changes from joint families to nuclear families. Educational level is increasing and making people aware of different modern norms and values. Women empowerment is also increasing. However, besides these changes the possibility of the extinction of Raji mother language, unique dress and ornamental pattern, specific dancing art and such other many aspects of unique Raji norms and values are at the verge of extinction.

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