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Exploring Urban Modernity : Social Change and Youth Identity in Kathmandu

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Abstract

This paper aims at assessing how modernity experienced in the urban space has affected the youths in the formation of identity in the selected area in Kathmandu known as Ward No. 16 of the Kathmandu Metropolitan Municipality. As a fact, several studies identified that specific dimension of urban modernity as a major factor that shapes the life styles, values and identity-related processes of the young generation. This form of research entails the use of questionnaires and conducting interviews to generate empirical findings from 39 participants within the age of 15-30 years. In this way, the presented data show that urban modernity impacts the youths' social values and their way of life in the context of Kathmandu. This research responds to the existing literature and policies on the socio-cultural factors that influence the development of youth in urban Nepal, specifically to encourage policies and programmes for successful youth development in the current context of urbanization. Nonetheless, the study has its own limitations, in particular, the selection of the participants involved only the inhabitants of one ward and, therefore, the predominance of one ethnic group, the limited number of participants in the study and the fact that the research of only one ward was aimed at. Even within these boundaries, the study can offer the educators, policymakers, and social workers the fundamental implications of the formation of the resilience and adaptability of youths living in doing so, and by tackling the impact and promises of urban modernity, this research points to the need for effective related environments for the youths of Kathmandu between continuity with tradition and novelty.

Keywords

Urban modernity, Social change, Youth identity, Kathmandu, Urbanization, Socio-cultural transformation.

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1. Introduction

Urban modernity is defined as transformation in the daily life, organization of society and patterns of behaviour and thought which arise from the process of urbanization. Harvey noted that an urban space is a fluid object that symbolizes the emergent features of a society in the areas of economy, politics, and sociology. There are very many reasons why urban modernity results to a shift from tradition and embracing of new attitudes and behaviours. The process that the society is going through entails the shift from established social relations and the promotion of self-interest, consumerism and new social relations (Harvey, 1989).

Erikson (1968) identifies that identity is one of the main psycho-social crisis described as a process aimed at attaining personal identity. It is argued that youth identity in urban context depends on peer groups, media, education, and socio-economic status of the young people (Arnett, 2000). The ingredients of identity formation are firstly, the cultural practice that shapes people's perception of themselves and the world around them, the secondly, the modernization formulate within the newly-formed urban setting. The youth in the urban region finds itself in a dilemma of how to be modern and at the same time practice their culture (Arnett, 2000).

This paper therefore aims at analyzing the level of urbanization and development of Kathmandu as one of the major city in Nepal. These demographic transitions are characterized by poor people moving from rural to urban areas resulting to the change in social structures, economy and culture of societies. As the constantly shifting social state asserts, young people of Kathmandu are in the middle of tradition and modernity. These changes can be attributed to the growth in the infrastructure, availability of better education and upliftment in the standard of media that has made youth more exposed to the outside world (Shrestha, 2015).

Studies that focused on Nepalese urbanization are numerous, and they analyzed many details of urbanization process in terms of

economic, social, etc. (Thapa, 2017; Pradhan, 2019). But for all the debates on urban modernity and youth identity, there seems to be no direct Nepali study focusing only on Kathmandu. According to Thapa (2017) the extent of urbanization has been imposing severe effects on the economic structures by causing a shift on employment opportunities and income equality. Turning to the social aspect, Pradhan (2019) paid much attention to changes in social relations, including families and the interactions within communities. However, this is a subject that lacks empirical research data and analysis hence this study seeks to make the necessary contribution in this area.

Urban modern context that reflect the process of urbanization and socio-cultural changes affecting the young people's life styles, values and identity construction. Based on the theories of urban modernity and identity, this research examines the ways through which the young generations grapples between traditional cultural conservations and the contemporary city.

Liechty (2003), in "Constructing the Modern Youth", looks at how youth identity was being fashioned among the new middle-class population of Kathmandu. He avows that the modern youth culture is hybrid in Kathmandu, both a local and a global produced formation and has the potential to be a generator of youth's sociality. This chapter expands on the manner in which Nepalese young manage their hope, social pressure and their culture with the growing globalization in mind (Liechty, 2003). Liechty (2003) focuses on the nature of building the modern youth identity among emerging middle-class population in Kathmandu. He wades into how the youth balances between the cultural norms and the drinking from the new of global prosperity. This offers a combined understanding of the moderation and the aspirations as depicted in the lives of middle class youths by outlining the complexities of identity in the society.

This research advances the knowledge on socio-cultural aspects related to youth living in urban Nepal, highlighting the necessity of developing appropriate interventions intended to enhance the well-being of youth in the face of Nepal's continuous urbanization. Overall, one can reiterate that the findings of the study, and its limitations, including the possibility of a relatively small number of participants and the fact that the study was carried out in one ward only, still can be deemed as providing valuable implications for educators, policymakers, and social workers interested in under-

standing the nature of adolescents' resilience and adaptiveness in the urban context. This study signifies the need to foster environments that can accommodate both the past and new modernity sought by the young people of Nepal especially in the context of Kathmandu's cultural and social transformation.

2. Statement of the Problem

Currently, Kathmandu, as a city in transition, entering a new phase of development, knows deep social changes, especially regarding the younger generation. This paper shall seek to establish the role played by urban modernity in the social construct of youths' personalities in the Ward No. 16, Kathmandu Metropolitan Municipality. The primary objective is to analyze the interactions between pre-modern cultures and the new culture brought by the process of urbanization. The aim of this study is to examine the socio-cultural factors that interface youth and consequently establish the appropriate policies and programs that may improve youth development especially in urbanized environment. As it rises to challenge of portraying the manner in which youths struggle to balance between the cultures of the old and the new as the society increases its pace in its urbanization, the novel enriches our understanding of the young generation. Thus, the study intends to explore these dynamics with the hope to understand the works by which urban modernity transforms socio-cultural values, lifestyles, and processes of identity formation among the youths in Kathmandu.

3. Research Questions

An attempt has been made to find answers to the following questions on the basis of empirical data:

1. How does urban modernity influence the social values and lifestyle of youth in Kathmandu?
2. What are the major factors contributing to the identity formation of youth in the study area?

4. Objectives

The objectives of this study are two-fold :

1. To explore the consequences of urban modernity on the social values and lifestyle of youth in Kathmandu.
2. To analyze the major factors influencing the identity formation of youth in the study area.

5. Significance of the Study

This research is important in providing a holistic description of the socio-cultural experiences of urban youth in Kathmandu. Thus, discussing the effects of urban modernity on youth identity, the study can be useful for heads of government, school personnel, and social workers. These findings will help develop appropriate and efficient youths' positive development framework in urban environment. Besides, the study adds to the theoretical body of knowledge regarding the process of urbanization and its social and cultural impacts, especially to stresses for young people requiring policies to change in order to create a supportive environment that lots of youth labelled as neurodiverse feel and succeed in. Thus, this research contributes to the discussion of the probability and probability of accommodation of youths in the tendency of urbanization to contribute to the overall positive development of youths depending on the prospects and challenges that come with the urbanizing environment of Kathmandu.

6. Limitations of the Study

The above study has the following limitations: Secondly, the respondents' response rate was 39, which is not sufficient to consider the results generalized for the entire youth of Kathmandu. The sampling fraction of the study is low hence its external validity is also low, this means that the study's findings cannot be generalized to the whole population. Further, the study is carried out in only Ward No. 16 which might not represent other wards or cities of the Kathmandu. These geographical and demographic conditions make the rationale of the study's suggestions specific to the cities only. The strategies are not without limitations some of which include; In light of such limitations, it is important to acknowledge that the current study has a lot of implication for understanding of socio-cultural processes at work and it has laid the ground work for future research with larger and more diverse samples.

7. Methodology

The study applies the quantitative survey method together with the qualitative interview method. Participants having their residence in Kathmandu Metropolitan Municipality's Ward No. 16 were 39 in numbers selected through purposive sampling. For

quantitative collection of data the structured questionnaires were used while for qualitative data the semi-structured interview guides were adopted.

8. Presentation of Data

The following tables depict data collected through structured questionnaires from the selected respondents :

Table-1 : Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-20	10	25.6
21-25	15	38.5
26-30	14	35.9
Gender		
Male	21	53.8
Female	18	46.2
Educational Level		
High School	10	25.6
Undergraduate	19	48.7
Graduate	10	25.6
Marital Status		
Single	30	76.9
Married	9	23.1

Source : Field Survey 2024.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that the majority were aged between 21-25 years (38.5%), followed by those aged 26-30 years (35.9%), and 15-20 years (25.6%). In terms of gender, 53.8% were male, and 46.2% were female. Regarding educational level, 48.7% were undergraduates, while 25.6% were high school graduates and 25.6% were graduates. Most respondents were single (76.9%), with a smaller proportion being married (23.1%).

Table-2 : Influence of Urban Modernity on Social Values and Lifestyle

Factors Influencing Social Values and Lifestyle	Frequency	Percentage
Adoption of Modern Fashion	32	82.1
Change in Dietary Habits	28	71.8
Increased Use of Technology	35	89.7
Shift in Family Dynamics	22	56.4

Source : Field Survey 2024.

The table above shows that a significant majority of youth adopted modern fashion (82.1%), changed their dietary habits (71.8%), and increased their use of technology (89.7%). Additionally, 56.4% reported a shift in family dynamics due to urban modernity.

Table-3 : Factors Influencing Youth Identity Formation

Factors Influencing Identity Formation	Frequency	Percentage
Peer Influence	30	76.9
Media and Entertainment	33	84.6
Educational Opportunities	29	74.4
Socio-economic Status	25	64.1

Source : Field Survey 2024.

The above table indicates that peer influence (76.9%), media and entertainment (84.6%), educational opportunities (74.4%), and socio-economic status (64.1%) are major factors influencing the identity formation of youth in Kathmandu.

9. Discussion

The study results, therefore, suggest that the social values, modes of living, and even the process of forming the youth’s identity is changing within the context of Nepalese urban modernity. Concerning the traditional practices, the accessibility of updated fashion, modification in the method of feeding, using technological devices, and alteration in the kind and structure of families also demonstrate the effects of urbanization on the youthful generation. These transformations conform to Harvey’s (1989 :15) observation that ‘cities’ and other topographical and geographical formations are

not fixed elements that can be divorced from the flow of history but actual expressions of historical economic, social, and political processes.

The fact that the youth's identity is shaped by the groups and media that they interact with coupled with the educational opportunities further support the interconnection of traditional and modern factors on youth identity formation. Arnett (2000) pointed out that youths in urban environments are in the vanguard of cultural trends whereby they try to balance between preserving cultural values in their lives but are on the same level adapting to urban cultures and ways of life. The results of this study are in line with such thinking as the respondents named peer groups and media as key identity sources.

In this case, digital integration increases rapidly among the youths of Kathmandu Durbar. The technological advances, specifically the usage of Internet, especially the social networks integration as a tool which plays a significant role in organizing their social lives. This is in line with the global trend where youths in urban areas are using the new technology to connect and manage their social relations influencing their More specifically youth across this generation is in line with Castell's (2010) observation that youth across this generation in the urban areas are connected through the new technologies and this is an influential aspect determining social behaviours and their identities.

In addition, change in demography where the family is forced to move from the rural to urban areas due to modernity portrays the society in another viewpoint. When young people embrace the spirit of the new world order that embraces individualism and freedom the structure and composition of families alter. This assertion can be attested to the observation made by Shrestha (2015) that the rapid growth of the urban centers; in this case Kathmandu has brought dramatic changes in the structure of the family and the social relations.

Education also emerges as an important factor that defines the young people's identities as showcased in the study. Youth education enables youths to gain the understanding and competencies in life that will enable them to survive, rise up and attain their dreams in urban centers. Nevertheless, the socio-economic status of respondents should not be omitted also because it implies the

availability of the resources and a number of opportunities. This can be explained through Bourdieu's (1984) social capital theory whereby social and economic capital present in a given culture influences the prospects of people in terms of their mobility.

However, it is important to provide some caveats to this study because every study has limitations. Although this study does not have an extensive list of such limitations, the following issues could be taken into consideration. The sample might be insufficient and more greatly inclined towards Ward No. 16, such that it may not represent the whole picture of youth in Kathmandu. Future studies should explore the same in a more diverse and a wider population group and for a more extensive period.

10. Conclusion

This research aimed at establishing the effects of urban modernity on social and youth identity change in Ward No. 16 of the KMM, Nepal. Overall, the findings indicated that the social change was realized in the areas of values and attitudes, life patterns as well as the mechanism of identity creation as a result of urbanization. Therefore the findings have enumerated modern fashion, change in food habits, use of gadgets and the change in family structure as some of the areas that depict modernity in everyday life.

Therefore, according to the present study, the youth in this urban context find peer pressure, media, educational opportunities and socio-economic status as significant in the construction of an identity. There is the influence the media, peers, which reveals the appearance of traditional cultural values in the context of modern urbanization. Frequency of technology use is also in line with the global trends that depict the importance of technology in the generation's social interaction.

As already indicated, there has been a change in family demography in line with other attributes prevailing in society. This shift from rural to urban settings brings up new forms of families and their roles evidencing the social change in the process. This shift is in congruence with Shrestha's (2015) study which concludes that urban development acquires a drastic change in the family and the social relations.

Learning is also one of the most important processes that significantly influences identity. This prepares the youths to

effectively deal with the urban life, and thus promoting their mobility and dreams in society. Socio-economic status however continues to be the most sensitive to youth's resources and opportunities in line with the Bourdieu's social capital theory.

Nevertheless, the research has some shortcomings. The sample size and a limited cross-sectional analysis of only one ward can also be considered as the study's weaknesses. Future research should include a larger and diverse sample from different wards to gain a broad understanding of youths' condition in Kathmandu.

Altogether, this chapter enhances the socio-cultural understanding of the young people in Kathmandu and provides ideas for further research as well as practical recommendations for the Nepalese policymakers, educators and social workers. The exploration of experiences of urban modernity and the issues of youth identity is necessary for the creation of the effective interventions prepared for the positive youth development of the countries which are experiencing the processes of rapid urbanization. Hence, the study's implication entails policies that support the maintenance of traditional culture and the assimilation of contemporary culture that creates contexts that help young people in Kathmandu cope with change.

Future studies should seek to explore these observations in more refined detail by involving larger and more heterogeneous populations to confirm hypotheses on the described tendencies. In this way, future investigative work can offer a strong basis to the conditions and changes of the growing youth in the regions similar to Kathmandu as a result of urban modernity, therefore engaging with the concerns and possibilities for the youth in the city.

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