

Social-cultural Change of Kusle People

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Doi : <https://doi.org/10.3126/pragya.v12i01.61637>

Abstract

Change is a law of nature as nothing is static in this world. No new generation can ever be an exact replica of the old one. Social structure is never static as various internal as well as external social conditions and circumstances change the structure and function of Kusle society and culture. It can be observed that numerous research works have been carried out within Newari ethnic groups. However, the present study provides an ethnographic description and socio-cultural change of the Kusle people of Kirtipur. The study employed quantitative research, with an emphasis on exploratory and descriptive research designs, and purposive sampling from four distinct wards of the municipality. The study demonstrates that due to the cultural contact with other castes people as well as education, modernization and consciousness the Kusle's social as well as cultural life is changing rapidly.

Key Words: social change, cultural change, Newars, Kusle people, and family system

1. Introduction

Nepal is composed of different caste and ethnic groups, with unique cultures, traditions, customs, religions, beliefs, and occupations which separate the people of country from one another. Of them the Newars are the most ancient people whose antiquity goes back to the time of Gautam Buddha. They claim to be the original inhabitant of the Kathmandu valley, which previously had three Newar city kingdoms, viz, Kantipur, Patan and Bhaktapur. The Gorkha prince Prithvi Narayan Shah annexed all these three kingdoms in 1825 B. S. and the valley hence forward became the capital of the new Gorkha kingdom, now called the kingdom of Nepal.

The Newars comprised the majority in population in the valley. However, they have been reduced to minority. In terms of culture and religious complex, the Newar still dominate in the valley. Within the Newar community, caste system (viz, priestly castes, high castes, upper-lower castes, lower castes, unclean castes, and untouchable castes) prevails based on the division of work.

Kusle is a sub-community, placed at the Newar untouchable caste hierarchy. The Kusle is called also Jugi or Jogi and are said to be descended from the ascetics of Nath sect and they are also known as "Darshandhari". This caste is divided into many sections on the basis of the types of musical instruments they play. But from the point of view of marriage, ceremonies and inter-dining all of these section acts as a single endogamous

group. Their priestly connections with many of the temples of local deities indicate their significant role in Newari community. They take Gorakhanath as their principal deity.

The Kusle caste has to provide music on auspicious occasions such as marriages and festivals. On the seventh day of mourning, he accepts cooked rice in the name of the dead. As “Deo-pala” at a temple, he comes in contact with other castes also. For example, the Kusle is the Deo-pala at the temple of “Bagh-Bhairava” in Kirtipur. In panga, he is the temple priest of “Bisendevi”. He is entitled to receive the offering made to the deity and can also touch it. In his secular role, he comes in contact with others mostly as a tailor (Nepali, 1965). Cultural change is a process by which the existing order to society is transformed from one type to another. Cultural change covers the more or less rapid process of modification in the political construction of a society in its domestic institutions and its mode of territorial settlement in its belief and system material tools and their use and the consumption of goods on which its socio-economy is based. In the widest sense, cultural change is a predominant factor of human civilization; it goes on everywhere and at all times (Malinowski, 1952).

1.1 Introduction of the Study Area

Kirtipur Municipality, with an ancient and traditional life, is one of the historical places located in Kathmandu district composed of 10 different wards, where we can observe the mixed rural and urban life pattern. This Municipality is linked with Kathmandu Metropolitan City in the west and is 7 kilometre from central Kathmandu. It is one of the settlements with majority of Newar as its inhabitants and the population of other caste and ethnic group is also in significant number.

The occupation of people in the rural area of the municipality is agriculture, with the remainder working in other occupations like business, foreign labour, local labour, employment, and so on classified as non-agricultural occupations. The primary crops include rice, millet, wheat, potatoes, vegetables, and so on, while the domestic animals include buffalo, cows, goats, poultry, and so on.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to find out the facts and figures relating to the people and their socio cultural lives of Kirtipur Municipality, whereas the specific objective of the study is to find out the social-cultural change taking place among Kusle people of Kirtipur.

3. Methods

The research design for this study is both exploratory and descriptive and the nature of study is qualitative and quantitative. This study is exploratory because it seeks to investigate the socio-cultural change taking place in the study area. At the same time this study is descriptive in nature since it seeks to facts and figures relating to the people and their socio cultural lives of Kirtipur Municipality. This article is prepared by using

primary data, collected from Interview Schedule and secondary data were taken from previous studies, published books and other related literature.

Kirtipur municipality is divided into 10 different wards. In these wards, people of several castes/ethnic groups reside. Ward no 2, 5, 7 and 10 of the Kirtipur municipality is selected for the study area. The reason for the selection of these wards is that Kusle households are not in other wards of the municipality. The actual number of Kusle household in ward no.2 is 6, in ward no. 5 is 8, in ward no. 7 is 15, and finally in ward no. 10 is 31. (Kirtipur Municipality, 2078.) There are 60 households altogether in these four wards. Out of that 30 household have been included in the present study through purposive sampling method.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Change in Family System:

Family is a universal institution found all over the countries and societies. It is almost first institution in the human civilization. Since the primitive period of all human group it has been a small social group consisting ordinary of father, mother and one or more children. This family system is categorized into several divisions; Nuclear, Joint and Extended family system.

Table 1: Types of family of the respondents

S.N.	Types of family	No. of family	%
1	Nuclear	16	53.34
2	Joint	8	26.66
3	Extended	6	20.00
	Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Work (2023)

Nuclear family consists of married couple with or without their unmarried children. Among the sampled household it was found that 16 household (53.34%) of the families were nuclear. So the researcher had found that most of the Kusle live in Nuclear. Especially Kusle of younger generation favor nuclear family system as they said that, there was no economic cooperation found in joint family and because of income disparity there was lack of 'we feeling' among the brothers.

Joint family consisting of husband, wife and married children with or without their children living together in which there is sharing of joint residence, kitchen and property. 26.66% of Kusle still live in joint family. In joint family system, all the earnings are shared equally by all the family members. Due to their economic condition and population pressure, they prefer joint family system. Kusle are, however, interested in nuclear family system. An extended family consists of father, mother, and their married children living together. In other words, an extended family is that family, which consist of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship rather than the husband-wife relationship. In the study area, among the 30 household, 6 of the family or 20.00% of the family are found to be an extended family which had been shown in the

table 1. During the field work, it was notice that Kusle have a patrilineal society. Their descendants are traced through the line of father. Their property goes to the line of father, not mother. The son can inherit it. When a daughter gets married, she will go to her husband's house (groom's house).

In the study area, according to some key informants, before 10-15 years, the Kusle people used to live in joint family. But now most of the Kusle live in nuclear family rather than joint and extended family. It is because of individualistic attitude and in the joint family they have to face many problems due to the nature of married wife, quarrels among wives of several brothers, they have to do many household works. In this connection, it can be said that due to the influence of modernization and extension of education people of the study areas prefer to live in the nuclear family.

5.2 Change in Marriage System:

Marriage, as an institution, is universal. Both man and woman are two sides of the same coin and marriage binds them together. It fulfills the physical, mental and biological needs of man and woman. Not only that but it also gives continuity to society by producing socially accepted children. Hence, marriage is a socially, economically, culturally important institution. Its types and forms differ from place to place and from one ethnic group to other in accordance with the rule and regulations and beliefs system of particular society. The following table shows the change in marriage system in the study area.

Table 2: Preference for marriage and engagement in marriage

S.N.	Types of marriage	Preference	%	Engaged	%
1.	Arrange	11	36.66	25	83.34
2.	Love	19	63.34	5	16.66
	Total	30	100	30	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The table shows that out of 30 respondents 25(83.34%) adopted arrange marriage and 5(16.66%) did love marriage in the study area. In the same way 11(36.66%) respondents give preference to arrange marriage and 19(63.34%) to love marriage. These data show that the Kusle people of Kirtipur are engaged in arranged marriage. The reasons behind engaging in arranged marriage is that in those days there is no cultural contact with outsiders and they did not want go against their parent view. They accept what their parents manage for them. But in recent periods the number of Kusle who prefer love marriage is increasing day by day. The reason behind is the education has played a crucial role. It is education which helped them to make contact with other socio-cultural life. Moreover, this social and cultural contact exerted great influence on them.

5.3. Change in Dress and Ornaments

As similar to other Newars, the Kusle people dress up in a very simple way. The Kusle wear waist-coat and Daura Suruwal, it may be cotton or woolen cloth, according to the season. The head dress of Kusle is a small skull cap of black (bhadgaunle topi or palpali

topi), thinly wadded with cotton and generally turned up for an inch or so at the border and their foot wears is a simple slipper. And the women of Kusle wearing a cloth by way of petticoat, almost touching the ground, and it are covered by patasi (traditional Newari Sari, black in colour with red border). Patasi is almost 3 to 4 meters long made up in their own cottage industries. Their upper part of the body is covered by Choubandi Cholo. They, make simple makeup in their face.

These are traditional dresses of Kusle people according to the respondents are suitable to their physical features and geographical environment. Since their contact with outer world, through education, social contact, media etc. their traditional patterns of dressing are gradually disappearing. Young Kusle people prefer to wear modern dresses such as pants, shirts and fashionable dress according to their economic status and interest. Likewise Kusle women have also started wearing modern saris, blouse and kurta suruwal. Young boys and girls prefer to wear fashionable clothes.

Likewise, change has also come to some extent in the ornaments. Traditionally they wear simple earrings, golden ornaments, pauju in legs (made of silver). Due to the influence of outsiders the women are started wearing fashioned earrings, necklace, hand rings made of gold, on the occasion of feast, festivals and ceremonies. The wealthy women wear lots of ornaments but others wear simple ornaments. Traditionally the Kusle women didn't wear nose ring but now a days they are starting to wear nose rings too because of the contact with outsiders. And they put sindur (vermilion powder) on their head after the Bel marriage, which is quite unique feature of Kusle as well as Newari culture. Previously, Kusle did not wear pants and shirts. Even now the old Kusle people don't wear pants and shirts.

5.4. Change in Food Habit

Food is the most important thing for living. Therefore people need food to live. Every society has its own types of food habits. Likewise, Kusle have certain kinds of food habits, similar to the other Newars, Kusle are great consumer of rice buffaloes, goats, ducks and chickens. The great part of their food consists of rice but rarely do they take other types of food. They also take the mixture of green vegetables, dry vegetables, potato, and different types of beans, which is called "Quanti". They use beaten rice (chiura) for lunch.

During the times of festivals and feast, they take food like chiura, raksi, different items of buff (chhyala, kachila, thalthale), different types of acchar made of potato, dry vegetables, tomato etc. the raksi is distilled from rice and wheat and families in their own houses prepare it. Kusle people of Kirtipur do not have cow and buffalo. Therefore, they do not take advantage of drinking milk and curd but now days with connection of other castes people started to drink milk and curd from collecting market. But now days those who claim themselves as a rich wealthy man stop drinking raksi, eating buff. Meat and they started leading their life differently from those of low income Kusle people. The Kusle prepare their meal themselves.

5.5. Change in Religions Religion:

The word called religion is extremely complex, intricate and full of paradox. It includes such facts as celebration, despair, mystery, animal sacrifice, ritual beliefs and dogmas about natural and super natural etc. Religion is a part of culture. Each and every society has its own religious tradition. Religion is an integral part of the Kusle people too.

Table 3: Religion of the respondents

Religion	No. of respondent	Percentage
Buddhist	17	56.68
Hindu	11	36.76
Christian	2	6.66
Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The table shows that the most of the Kusle are Buddhist and their number is 17. Similarly the 11 Kusle household also follows the Hinduism and Christian are also found in the study area. The number of Christian is 2. It doesn't mean that the Hindu Kusle don't follow Buddhist and the Buddhist Kusle don't follow Hinduism. Both follow both religions. There is religious harmony. Both visit Hindu and Buddhist religious site. Change in religion is also observed in the study area as out of 30 households 2 household change their religion. The Christian found in the sturdy area stop visit religious site and stop celebrating their traditional culture.

5.6. Change in Religions Festivals

In Nepal as in all countries, festivals are celebrated in slightly different ways, and with varying degrees of intensity depending upon locality, economic and social status education, religion and family background and personal inclination (Anderson, 1977). Nepali people celebrate different types of festivals, according to the culture and tradition. They worship different gods and goddess and they enjoy eating, drinking and feasting. The Newars celebrate all festivals, but their styles of performing a few festivals are different from other castes. Besides the three purely Hindu festivals of the Phagu, Dashain and Tihar which are observed by all classes of Nepalese people. There are certain festivals in Nepal which are peculiar to Newars, and which found no counterpart in the plains of India.(Brook: 1928,168) the Kusle celebrate Dashin in October, Tihar in November, Phagu in march, Maghe Sankranti in February, Krishna Asthami in September etc. the Kusle of Kirtipur celebrate these festivals which is similar to the other Newari castes people.

5.7. Change in Economy of Kusle People

To know the overall condition of the Kusle, we have to know the economic condition of Kusle of Kirtipur. Economic status reflects the cultural or intellectual development of certain place and it also measures the physical facilities of the people. Of course the primary (traditional) occupation of the Kusle is temple priest but now different factor are forcing certain changes in the occupational pattern. Education, modernization and

consciousness itself have been the main responsible factor for the occupational mobility of the Kusle. Of the total respondents, only one Kusle (3.33%) has been working as temple priest in Bishnu Ddevi temple. Now, they have been engaged in other works like agriculture, carpenter, business, office service, driver, tailor musician etc. completely avoiding their traditional occupation.

Table 4: Economic Activities of the Sampled Household

S.N	Economic Activities	No. of Household	Percentage
1	Temple Prist	1	3.33
2	Agriculture	13	43.33
3	Carpenter(wage labour)	6	20.02
4	Government service	4	13.33
5	Business	2	6.66
6	Others	4	13.33
	Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The table shows that, only one person (3.33%) of the total population is still continuing the traditional occupation. Rest of all changed their traditional occupation. The main occupation of the Kusle of the study area is agriculture that accounts about 43.33% of the total household. According to the obtained information, out of 30 household 27 household (90%) have their own land and the remaining 3 household (10%) do not have their own land. They cultivate land in Adhya system.

Six household (20.02%) engaged in carpentry works, they work in furniture shops as a wage labour. Through which they fulfill their daily needs, which is second largest occupation adopted by Kusle in the study area. Among 30 household, 4 household (13.33%) engaged in government service in different posts. From which they manage their family's needs. Two Kusle (6.66 of the total household) engaged in business. Which includes shopkeeper of daily goods. They maintain their family from the earnings of the shop. Although the main occupation of the Kusle is agriculture and supported by carpentry, business, service, the 13.33% of the Kusle involve in other economic activities as music teacher, electrician, and driver.

Due to the decreasing value of money and price of the commodity is increasing day by day. The cash becoming more necessary for fulfilling the increasing needs of the daily life. Therefore Kusle change their traditional occupation into more income generating works. However, now days, the Kusle earn sufficient money by doing different economic activities.

6. Conclusion

Traditional social institution of a Kusle, marriage, family, religion etc. is changing day by day. Before 10-15 years the Kusle people used to live in joint family, but at present most of the Kusle want to live in nuclear family rather than in joint and extended family. It is because of their socio-economic condition, influence of high caste people and extension of

education and cultural contact with other caste people. Most of the Kusle of Kirtipur is followers of Buddhism. They celebrate feast and festivals similar to the other Newars of Kirtipur. Beside these changes, Kusle of Kirtipur is preserving their some traditional culture and in the same way they adopted some western culture simultaneously. Due to the cultural contact with other castes people as well as education, modernization and consciousness the Kusle's social as well as cultural life is changing day by day.

Similarly, traditional occupation of the Kusle people was temple priest but they totally changed their occupation. The main occupation of the Kusle of Kirtipur is agriculture and some Kusle are shifting to other modern income generating activities. In the study area male are slightly economically active than female. In the same way they maintain their traditional rituals and their social prestige which they have already earned.

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