

Rupantaran : A Multidisciplinary Journal
 Vol. VI : pp 85-95, July, 2022
 ISSN (Print) : 2091-0061, ISSN (Online) : 2738-9960
<https://doi.org/10.3126/rupantaran.v6i01.46990>
 Research Management Cell (RMC)
 Dhankuta Multiple Campus, Dhankuta
 Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Changing Dynamics of the Bote Communities in Sarlahi and Tanahun: A Comparative Study

Umesh Acarya¹

Email : acharyaumesh082@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyse the lifestyle of the Botes living in Baireni of Tanahun and Karmaiya of Sarlahi District of Nepali. Traditional livelihood patterns of both places are in transition. Now they are shifting towards agriculture, manual labour, government job, carpentry and engaging in foreign employment. To examine all these issues, this research has adopted over two geographical locations, namely Baireni of Tanahun district and Karmaiya of Sarlahi district; the method is exploratory, descriptive and comparative. In order to meet the objectives of this research, data collections were from multiple approaches. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and household surveys were two forms of the the data collection in this research. Collection of oral history, key informant interview, focus group discussion, informal meeting were also applied. It has made the entire methodology an admixture of Qual-Quan approaches. This study concludes that there are a number of instances of livelihood diversification among the Botes of Karmaiya in Sarlahi and Baireni in Tanahun district. Some of such diversifications include commercialization of farm in the rural Bote villages. This has come about because of urban expansion, expansion of various non-agricultural work opportunities in factories, workshops, private offices and to some extent government office as a result of urbanization. This supports the findings of Ellis (1998) and Babbington (1999).

Key words: livelihood, development, complex, modernization, transition

Introduction

Livelihood, in a very basic sense, is a means of gaining a living. The term 'livelihood' is often associated with employment and financial measurement. Ellis (1998) has his own definition about livelihood: "Livelihood are the activities, the assets and the access that jointly determine the living gained by an individual or

1. Mr Acharya is an associate professor of Population Studies at Tribhuvan University. Central Department of Population Studies, Kirtipur, Kathmandu.

household, which encompasses income, both cash and in kind, as well as the social institutions (Kin, family, compound, village and so on), gender relations, and property rights required to support and sustain a given standard of living” (1999, p. 1).

The concept of livelihood is complex and multi-dimensional. It is interrelated with various factors, which make it a holistic phenomenon. Livelihood is another name for survival of the human beings, and has remained so right from the very onset of human existence. It is concerned with various survival needs of the people, and encompasses many aspects of living, including poverty and survival, various economic activities including mechanisms and practices of the individuals and groups and the society as a whole. In addition, the term ‘livelihood’ conceptualizes assets, access and different activities carried out by individuals or groups for their daily lives. The concept of livelihood basically looks at people’s means of gaining a living as a process of accessing various livelihood assets such as financial, human, social, physical, natural capitals through various livelihood strategies. In other words, livelihood signifies an occupation carried out by the people eking out their living in the world. Livelihood patterns in terms of the activities and strategies associated with survival and sustainability vary in forms and manifestations across the globe. They vary depending upon ecology, stages of economic development; nature of civilization, rural-urban variation, ethnic and cultural values and practices etc. Whatever the forms of livelihood in whichever part of the world, it is meant for survival with dignity and sustainability.

Rural livelihood has remained a contentious matter of debate since the decade of the 80’s. Since from the 90’s, it has become one of the most important aspects of discussion in the discourse of development. After the decade of 90’s or after the establishment of multiparty democracy in Nepal, people are becoming slowly aware of their rights and the development of their communities. This kind of awareness has been increasing among all the communities of Nepal, including the Bote community. Studies on the Botes are basically descriptive and provide basic information about them. But studies on their livelihood and changes which have taken place over time in their livelihood strategies are very limited. The little that exists does not provide any comparative insight into such changes from the perspective of ecological regions. Livelihood is determined by a number of factors. Enormous diversity of livelihood strategies exists at every level within a geographic area. They change over time, due to environmental factors, socio-cultural factors such as tradition, and ethnic and caste identity. Similarly, the political system within people’s habitation or state also determines whether a livelihood pattern persists or undergoes changes. Most of the researchers focus on the shift or change of livelihood caused by the construction of bridges and modernization of the society.

The concept of livelihood system allows a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of poverty. Livelihood means adequate stock and flow of food and cash

to meet the basic needs. Thus, livelihood is understood broadly as activities of the people by investing their capabilities to earn assets, both (claims and access) materials (resources and stores) and gain from what they do (Chambers and Conway, 1992). Livelihood generation includes all activities undertaken by people to meet their basic needs and for the result or outcome of those activities, the term 'livelihood' is used (Niehof & Price, 2001). The definitions of the concept of livelihood raise concerns because they fail to distinguish the process, activities, assets, resources and outcomes. Numerous activities undertaken to generate livelihood indicate the working of a multifaceted and dynamic system, referred to as the livelihood system (Niehof & Price, 2001). The concept of livelihood system suggests an integrated household economy with individual members who participate in farm or non-farm economic activities. A system is a group of interacting components operating together for a common purpose. A livelihood system sustains the need of individuals in a community, without causing negative externalities in social and ecological systems (Mishra, 2014). Livelihood system is also part of an external system such as ecological and policy framework. These are in fact, conceptualized in livelihood framework (Mishra, 2014). A livelihood system consists of a hierarchy of boundaries: individual, family, community, local administration and ecological units. Livelihood becomes sustainable when it adapts with or recovers from poverty and vulnerability, and achieves through changes in livelihood strategies.

This study intends to analyse livelihood dynamics of a "Bote" community in Nepal. The word 'Bote' is a term used by Nepali speakers to identify a particular group of indigenous Nepalese people. The etymological analysis of the name presents another possibility that these people called the Botes were without land and house. So they took shelter under a *bot* meaning, a tree by the river bank and ultimately became the Botes as they are regarded now. The Botes might have used tree trust as boat before the invention of a boat and this tribe was known as Bote, later demoting those people who occasionally engaged in ferry service". The Botes are also occasionally referred to as 'Kushar' in Terai. They also have a lot of similarity with the Majhis, people of another fishing tribe living in Nepal, and some neighbouring states of India. The majhis, Botes and Kushars of Nepal speak one language and follow the same patterns of life. So, they are identical. This study is therefore, directed towards how the livelihood strategies of Bote community in Tanahun and Sarlahi of Nepal are shifting from one particular traditional stage to modern age. Bote is one of the backward ethnic groups of Nepal and they settle in both hill and Terai regions. They are living in a poor economic condition, and are illiterate, socially backward and downtrodden, compared with other ethnic group of Nepal. Many studies have been carried out so far about the Botes of hills, inner Terai and Terai (Bista, 1967; Kaini, 19; Subba, 1989). These studies are basically descriptive and provide basic information about the Botes living in different places of Nepal, but they lack study on livelihood basically focusing on the changes which occurred over time. They also do not provide

any comparative perspective from ecological regions. According to the studies done by various scholars, the traditional occupations of the Botes are fishing, boating, gold panning and collecting forest product. Studies show that the socio-economic change among the Botes is high. As the development and other economic activities change the surrounding environment of a space, the people of that particular space have to change their ways of life to adopt with the changing environment. But rapid modernization, urbanization and globalization pushed them in the transition which provides both opportunities as well as constraints. The goal of this research is to analyse the livelihood condition of the Bote in Tanahun and Sarlahi. Hence this study focuses on changes in livelihood strategy of the Botes of Sarlahi and Tanahun. The main objective of this paper is to compare the lives of Bote communities in Sarlahi and Tanahun districts.

Theoretical Review

There are various ways of describing and explaining social change. Social change is defined as the alteration of social interactions, institutions, stratification systems and elements of culture over time that is relatively important (Vago, 1989). Societies are in a regular state of change. Some changes are rapid (e.g. current social and cultural change due to computers and mobile phones), and other changes are more gradual (e.g. economic development). Parsons (1966) identified four inevitable processes of social change, namely *Differentiation*, which refers to the increasing complexity of social organisation (e.g. healthcare carried out by nurses, pharmacists, doctors, physiotherapists etc. instead of one herbalist/*Sangoma* in traditional societies). Adaptive upgrading is operational when social institutions become more specialised (e.g. doctors specialise as cardiologists, surgeons, obstetricians, orthopaedists, etc.); examples include inclusion of previously excluded groups (e.g. current affirmative action policy in South Africa), generation of new values that tolerate and legitimate a great range of activities (e.g. dieting seen as preventive medicine). According to the first two theories of livelihood and diversification, rural livelihood (of the Botes) is multidimensional and this study tries to provide links between the different rural livelihood strategies and household well-being. In addition, it further states that livelihood diversification activities have become an important income generating strategy for rural small farm households throughout the developing world.

A livelihood is described in this study as comprising of systematic activities or enterprises undertaken by individuals/households using their capabilities and available opportunities to derive material/ financial reward and / or improved status, or to produce food for sale rather than for household consumption (Hussein & Nelson, 1998 in Assan, 2014). Nadal (2012) mentions Rostow and Frank in regard to their approach of underdevelopment and the stages of economic growth. Rostow seeks to identify the mechanisms by which traditional agrarian societies like Botes begin the process of modernization through different stages: traditional society, preconditions for take-

off, the take-off, the drive to maturity and finally the age of high mass-consumption. Frank (1972) presents a theory of modernization that is based on a global relation of economic domination and exploitation, or what he calls “metropolis-satellite relations. Frank argues that underdevelopment stems from this metropolis-satellite relation because it is essentially a hierarchical relation of extraction and expropriation which then becomes generalized on a global scale.

Methods and Material

This research is an inquiry into Botes’ ways of life, basically their livelihood strategies vice-versa the changing patterns of living. It maps both the past and present livelihood strategies and seeks to understand the changes that have become apparent in the past few decades. The research also delves into the cause of these changes, their impact on the overall socio-economic life of the Botes and their likelihood in the days to come. It analyses the concurrent life strategies they have adopted in relation to various environmental, socio-cultural and political factors. Additionally, it explores the ways the Botes have coped up with the changing environment, particularly in the face of globalization and modernization.

To address all these issues, the research has adopted over two geographical locations, namely Baireni of Tanahun district and Karmaiya of Sarlahi district; the method is exploratory, descriptive and comparative. In order to meet the objectives of this research multiple methods of data collection have been employed. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and household surveys two core methods of data collection in this research. Collection of oral history, key informant interview, focus group discussion, informal meeting were employed in the field study, making the entire methodology an admixture of Qual-Quan approach. Mainly the data is more qualitative and quantitative.

Generation of data is extremely crucial for every research. From the research areas in the two districts discussed above, all the marginal Bote households were selected. 56 households from the two locations, a total of 112 households were selected as sample for household information collection. The rationale between making 56 the sample household number for this research is that, Baireni has a total household number of 56, and taking the same number of households from Karmaiya makes the study comparable. Moreover, since the discrepancy is not much big, the number of households very well represents the communities and becomes well representative. When it comes to qualitative research like the present one, it becomes even more indispensable. The more authentic the data, more reliable is the outcome. The data used in this research, both qualitative and quantitative have been received through different means. The survey of the respondents habits, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs etc. are major sources of qualitative data, while the quantitative ones were derived through a survey of the respondents’ income, occupation, education, family size and structure,

etc. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. Primary data have been collected from questionnaire (household survey), key informant interview and focused group discussion (FGD). Secondary data have been collected from various types of literature, for example, relevant materials published by government and other related agencies. Similarly, the secondary data have been collected from various types of relevant literatures, such as articles, books, website, journals, newspaper, reports and publications. Key informant interviews form one of the most fundamental aspects of the methodology adopted for this research. These interviews were organized at different phases of the field research. In the starting of this research interviews were organized with key informants for introducing field team at local level and information of the research location. This was organized for different information on the livelihood patterns of the Botes of Tanahun and Sarlahi. Key informants were organized to complete the lacking informants of the research. Social workers, primary teachers, senior citizens, local leaders of different political parties, secretary of VDC office were the key informants at Karmaiya (Sarlahi) and Baireni (Tanahun). This research was implemented with Semi-structured and unstructured interview. The details of the household-heads are listed in the table below:

Table 1: Genders of the Household Heads (HH Head)

Sex of Household Head	Tanahun		Sarlahi	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Male	47	83.9	44	78.6
Female	9	16.1	12	21.4
Total	56	100	56	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The above table shows that about 84% are males and about 16% are females in Tanahun, whereas around 79% are males and around 21% are females in Sarlahi. Comparing the gender of the respondents, more males have been included in the sample compared to females.

Table 2: Religion by household head in the sample district

Religion	Tanahun		Sarlahi	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Hindu	53	95.6	56	100
Buddhist	2	3.6		
Not Reported	1	1.8		
Total	56	100	56	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The above table shows religion by household head in Tanahun and Sarlahi district. According to this table, Hindu religion looks strong in both the districts. Almost everyone is a Hindu. According to the 2011 national census the number of

Hindu is 95.6% only 3.6% are Buddhists and 1.8% have not reported their religion in Tanahun district. Sarlahi is a Hindu-dominated district where 100% of the people are Hindus.

Table 3: Education level of the household heads in the sample districts

Education level	Tanahun		Sarlahi	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Primary	8	15.3	3	5.4
Secondary	12	21.4	16	28.6
S.E.E	4	7.1	10	17.9
Literate only	8	15.3	-	-
Illiterate	14	25.0	27	48.2
Not reported	10	17.9		
Total	56	100	56	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The above table shows that the education level of household head in primary level of education in Tanahun is 15.3% and 15.4% in Sarlahi. Tanahun looks good in educational sector. Secondary level students are under 21.4% in Tanahun whereas they are 28.6% in Sarlahi, S.E.E level students are 7.1% in Tanahun, but 17.9% in Sarlahi district. The percentage of literate is 15.3% in Tanahun district. However, there is no data of literate in Sarlahi. Illiterate percentage is higher in Sarlahi district because 48.2% people are illiterate but only 25% are illiterate in Tanahun. There is no data about not reported section of Sarlahi districts but 17.9% people are in this section in Tanahun. The total household population is 56 in this survey.

Table 4: Sector of Employment in the Sample District

Sector of Employment	Tanahun		Sarlahi	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Agriculture	50	27.5	41	17.1
Animal husbandry	7	3.8	1	0.4
Business	3	1.6	5	2.1
Wage Earner	31	17	39	16.3
Remittance	12	6.6	21	8.8
Service/Job	14	7.7	13	5.4
Student			44	18.3
Household	10	5.5	2	25.8
Not Reported	55	30.2	15	5.8
Total	182	100	240	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The above table shows that in Sarlahi, household work is a major source of employment and agriculture, wage earning labour, foreign employment, service,

business and animal husbandry appear in descending order in terms of the number of people involved. Even in Sarlahi, 5.8 % of sampled Botes are engaged in sectors that have not been reported.

Results and Discussion

The Bote people have been living in the study area many years. From the field study, it has been found that they have been living in both the locations- Baireni in Tanahun and Karmaiya in Sarlahi for at least six generations. To explore their traditional way of earning livelihood was thought relevant in the context of their changing livelihood strategies. The main traditional occupation of the Botes is fishing and boating. The fish constitutes their main diet. They have been practicing it since a long time ago. However, they are more indulged in agricultural activities these days, besides taking up diverse jobs like carpentry, wage labour, foreign employment, small business, government employment etc. The Botes still believe that they have some special relation with rivers and were born one day before the rivers come into existence. They have a great deal of experience in fishing and possess vast knowledge about fish. They catch a variety of fish in the rivers. Fishing is practiced in the night too. They use different fishing techniques in different seasons. In the study, the Botes catch fish by constructing a tip, using nets, using hooks, poisoning, hatching, changing the main course of a small rivulet and removing water from the small ditches in the river. But these days, the Botes are gradually moving away from fishing- their traditional source of income- to other occupations due to various reasons like scarcity of fish in the rivers, appearance of dams across the rivers, other communities turning towards fishing in the same river, etc.

In recent times, some changes have appeared in the everyday life, traditional occupations and cultural practices of the Botes. This study makes an evaluation of these changing patterns. The Botes studied under this project are one of the inhabitants of Damauli of Tanahun and Karmaiya of Sarlahi. Their major settlement is situated on the banks of various rivers. Nowadays, the Botes' lives are changing. They have changed their professions like other people of Nepal and have chosen other professions as their livelihood i.e. civil services, carpentry, foreign employment, teaching, veterinary, cycle shops and various technical and non-technical works. In spite of such job diversification, they still continue to live a life of backwardness compared with their counterparts in other communities. The income diversification is an important livelihood outcome of the study areas, Almost all households belong to more than two income sources in Bote village of *Damauli* than that of Sarlahi. The multiple income sources have important roles in reducing vulnerability when one income source encounters a setback.

The livelihood strategy of the Bote community in the study area is in transition. Botes of Damauli are in the process of shifting from agriculture to non-agricultural livelihood patterns gradually. The household assets of this community have been greatly influenced by the process of adoption of new strategies and modification of traditional occupations. The households with comparatively better access to the capital to pursue livelihood have been enjoying the benefits of urbanization in their areas more easily than the households that have less access to such assets. As the development and other economic activities change the surrounding environment of a community, the people of that community change their way of life to adapt with the change in environment.

The traditional livelihood patterns of the Botes of Sarlahi and Tanahun have changed by a great degree. Traditional livelihood patterns of the Botes are boating, fishing and collecting the forests products and gold panning, which are declining in some places. Baireni is situated six kilometres north from Vyas Municipality. The Botes living there are still following traditional livelihood pattern. But in the context of Karmaiya, Sarlahi, the Botes are becoming modernized and are adopting new livelihood strategies such as working abroad, entering to the government job, teaching and agriculture. Both places are going in the process of urbanization. Karmaiya is very close to Mahendra Highway and Baireni is close to Prithvi Highway. The two locations are situated in different ecological belts. Baireni is situated in sub-temperate ecological zone whereas Karmaiya is situated in sub-tropical zone. As they are situated in different ecological belts no much difference is found in the livelihoods pattern of the Botes. As they belong to different ecological zones, the Botes of Sarlahi appear quite dark of complexion, while those of Baireni appear fair. It looks socially awkward that even in this era, no one from the Bote community has completed bachelor's degree. But the good thing about this community in both the districts is that the Botes are educating their children for getting better opportunities for a better life. Comparing at the microscopic level, literacy in Sarlahi is better than that in the mid-hill district, Tanahun.

Regarding the female family heads in both districts, 21.4% of Bote households in Sarlahi have females as their heads, while the figure is only 16.1% in Tanahun. Socially, it looks good, but financially households with female heads are found weaker than those with male family heads. It indicates a crucial need of empowerment to Bote females for their financial stability. It was found that Tanahun-based Botes are employed in agricultural setting, whereas in Sarlahi, household work at a landlord's family is more common. Though in both places, they are doing similar works; differences are found on the degree of their dependence upon the job providers. Botes of Sarlahi are more independent than those in Tanahun. The Botes are found

using modern enmities in both the districts. In use of information base enmities like phone and television, the Tarai-based Botes have more accessible to information and communication. Moreover, in Sarlahi and Tanahun, Bote ride bicycles. On the basis of the description so far, it can be ascertained that their specific cultural practices make the Botes unique as compared to others.

Conclusion

The rural livelihood has been a matter of great discussion since the decade of 1980s. Especially from the decade of 1990s, it became the most important aspect of the discussion in the discourse of development. After the decade of 1990s or the establishment of multiparty democracy, people are becoming slowly aware about their rights and the development of their communities. The main inhabitants of Karmaiya are the Botes and the main inhabitants of Baireni are also Botes. The Botes of Karmaiya have migrated from nearby Chure ranges and hilly place, whereas the Botes of Tanahun have migrated from nearby Madi River basin. Finally, this study concludes that there are a number of instances of livelihood diversification among the Botes of Karmaiya, Sarlahi and Baireni, Tanahun. Some of such diversifications include commercialization of farm in the rural Bote villages. This has come about because of urban expansion, expansion of various non-agricultural work opportunities in factories, workshops, private offices and to some extent government office as a result of urbanization as explained by Ellis and Babbington. The relation between diversification and specification is the one tied between assets and capabilities, also closely connected with a community's livelihood. Assets and Capabilities are conditions on which diversification depends. As explained by Bebbington (1999), the relationship between assets and capabilities particularly viewing assets not only allows survival, adaptation and poverty alleviation but also works as the basis of agents' power to act and reproduce challenge. It also changes the rules that govern the controlled use and transformation of resources applicable among the Botes. Further research is also needed to improve the lives of the Botes of Sarlahi and Tanahun.

References

- Bebbington.A.(1999). Capitals and capabilities: A framework for analyzing peasant. *World Development*, 27(12), December 99, 2021-2044. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(99\)00104-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(99)00104-7)
- Bista, D.B. (1967). *People of Nepal*. RatnaPustakBhandar.
- Chambers, R & Conway, R. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century*. IDS discussion paper.
- Ellis, F. (1998). Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification. *The Journal of Rural Studies*, 44 (April, 2016)239-249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220389808422553>

- Frank, A.G. (1972). The development of underdevelopment. In James D., Cockcroft, J.D, Frank, A.G & Johnson D (Ed.), *Dependence and underdevelopment*. Anchor Books.
- Hussein, K & Nelson, J. (1998). *Sustainable Livelihoods and livelihood diversification*. IDS Working Paper 69, IDS.
- Kaini, P. (1999). *Botejatiko adhyayan : Kehichhodiye kojatiharukosamajik adhyayan [A study of the Bote community: A social study of some backward communities]*. CNAS, Tribhuvan University.
- Mishra, P.K. (2014) *Forest Policies and Tribal Livelihoods : An Organizational Perspective*. National Conference on Conceptualising and Contextualising Tribes in Contemporary India, Institute of Development Studies.
- Nadal, P (2012), *Underdevelopment and historicism: W.W. Rostow and Andre Gunder Frank*.
- Niehof, A & Prince, L.L (2001). *Rural livelihood systems: A conceptual framework*. UPWARD.
- Parsons, T. (1966). *Societies: Evolutionary and comparative perspectives*. Prentice Hall.
- Subba, S. (1989). *Botes: The Ferryman of Tanahun*. Ashok Kumar Limbu and Kumar Bahadur Rai.
- Vago, S. (1989). *Social change*. Prentice-Hall.

