



Rural Tourism Development: A Case Of Homestays At Tharu Community In Nepal

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Abstract

This paper discusses the transformation of indigenous culture and the promotion of rural tourism development towards modernisation from traditional. Rural tourism is a dominant factor in promoting local cultures and heritages along with upgrading local people's lifestyles. This paper also examines rural tourism development and the existing challenges in Naya Gaon. It explores the potentiality of homestay tourism, which is significantly promoting local people's livelihoods. To better understand the present situation of the village, this study employed mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative. Nevertheless, ethnography as a prior research technique was used for data collection. This technique helped explore the formerly existing local culture, which was transforming into a new model. It also shows that homestay tourism has supported Tharus in the improvement of their socio-economic status and daily habits. In addition, it has enhanced indigenous knowledge and skills to sustain local products. Tharu women have been more empowered both socially and economically. Most noticeably, residents are getting rid of Kamaiyas (Bonded Labourers) and Sukumbashi (Slums).

Keywords: Tourism Management, Rural Development, Rural Tourism, Social Entrepreneurship, Hospitality and Tourism, Tharu Community.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-expanding sectors (WTO, 2003; Campbell, 1999). 'Atithi Devo Bhavah', which translates as 'The Guest is Equivalent to God' (Kapur, 2016), is a common Nepali ideology that has guided the development of homestay tourism in Nepal. Nepalis see their visitors as gods and greet them with warmth and hospitality consistent with their lifestyle (Lama, 2013). In August 2010, the Nepalese government formally launched the homestay tourist program to enact the 'Homestay





Regulation 2067' (Devkota 2008, as cited in Lama, 2013). According to Nepal Tourism Statistics (2018), the number of homestays in the country has increased by 14.48 per cent to 324.

Rural tourism is gaining popularity in developing countries as it embodies distinct and exotic social, cultural, hospitality, and service offerings created by man and provided by nature. While homestay tourism is a new concept in Nepal, it has exploded in popularity over the last decade, particularly in rural areas blessed with natural beauty, for a small-scale homestay operation requires minimum knowledge, skills, and physical resources. It offers enormous potential in Nepal for incorporating rural people into tourism and improving their livelihoods while maintaining nature, rural lifestyles, culture, and identity (Karki, et al. 2019). Each day, hundreds of international tourists visit Nepal to enjoy the country's diverse cultures and natural splendour. Through wage labour, pack animal hiring, or guiding, tourism has offered social mobility for the traditionally disadvantaged (Ortner, 1999). As a result of migrations, new development concepts and methodologies are being used to alter local conditions. Social entrepreneurship is a new strategy for development that focuses on rural tourism. Consequently, tourism is utilised as a channel for informational flows such as knowledge transfer, cultural mediation, and the maintenance of relationships and the formation of networks (WTO, 2009).

Tourism comes in a variety of forms. So, rural tourism can also be a form of tourism in rural areas. It is rural in scale, character, and function, emulating the varied and complex rural environment, economy, history, and geography (Lane, 1994b). It is mostly a domestic phenomenon that varies considerably among countries and continents (Gartner, 2004; Sharpley and Roberts, 2004). In terms of rural tourism, homestay tourism is viewed as an alternative form of tourism that has aided in the sustainable development of numerous communities worldwide (Kwaramba, et al., 2012). Similarly, homestay is community-based, including community-based promotion, decision-making, and benefit-sharing (Acharya, 2018), and acts as an alternative strategy for improving rural communities' socio-economic conditions (Wijesundara & Gnanapala, 2016). Homestay has additionally developed a personality and garnered appeal throughout the country (Devkota, 2010). It provides tourists with a one-of-a-kind opportunity to explore the village's vibrant and welcoming traditions. Activities associated with homestay are believed to boost tourism on a local level by preserving indigenous culture, customs, and environment and empowering indigenous people through money and employment opportunities (Lama, 2014). It is a critical economic growth strategy that propels the rural economy forward by providing money, employment, and industry. Undoubtedly, rural tourism is an extremely effective tool for poverty alleviation. Should proper, pertinent laws and strategies be implemented in





conjunction with adequate resource utilisation and in-depth study, rural tourism can transform impoverished and underprivileged residents (Thapa, 2016). Similarly, Tharus provide homestays based on local knowledge and abilities. They view homestay as a subset of village tourism, which entails staying in someone's home and allowing visitors to experience a destination in an authentic, comfortable, and homey atmosphere. Thus, homestay tourism aids them in preserving their cultures and preserving their true identities.

This study aims to explore why Tharus are using rural tourism as a means of promoting and safeguarding their cultures, as well as how homestay businesses are assisting their community in developing rural tourism and managing rural development. Similarly, it also examines the types of homestay tourism practices prevalent in the Tharu community. These research questions are critical for achieving the study's research objectives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition and Relevance of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is a source of income for rural people (Thakuri, 2016), yet it is dynamic and ever-changing, necessitating vision and foresight. Nepal has established an eco-tourist component through rural tourism. It allows tourists to witness rural hamlets inhabited by diverse species and cultures. Visitors stay in traditional Nepali villages, eat delectable native cuisine, drink local beverages, and stay in comfortable accommodations provided by host families, gaining first-hand knowledge of their cultural practices (Gurung, 2012). As a result, visitors assist residents in promoting income production and rural livelihoods.

Rural tourism as a tourist experience provides guests with a personalised experience, a taste of the countryside's physical and human surroundings, and the opportunity to engage in local people's activities, traditions, and lifestyles (Aref & Gill, 2009). Similarly, it is defined as the actions of individuals travelling to and staying in rural areas without mass tourism for less than one year consecutively for leisure, business, and other purposes (Lebe & Milfelner, 2006). It strives to contribute to the long-term viability of rural living. It should be a force for rural sustainability rather than urbanisation (OECD, 1994, as cited in Nair, 2014). It relies on a diverse array of publicly and privately held natural and cultural resources, accompanying infrastructure, interpretive facilities, and the provision of lodging, food, beverages, and other goods (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008). Additionally, it pertains to rural areas, indigenous cultures, customs, and social practices.

Migrants are seen to be moderate to highly empowered, particularly as it relates to accessing training and education programs, as well as making decisions concerning





their business. Male migrants and female entrepreneurs value economic and social rewards more than environmental benefits. While unfavourable exchange rate shocks have no statistically significant effect on household consumption, it promotes education and the establishment of capital-intensive entrepreneurial activity, as Yang (2008) illustrates. To promote equity and sustainable natural resource management, Rural Community Enterprises (RCEs) can promote fairness and sustainable natural resource management by supporting economic growth (Donovan, et al., 2008, as cited in Wongadisai, et al. 2020).

Tourism growth encourages people to pursue higher education and seek new employment, thereby increasing the literacy rate. It enables future generations to redefine and reassert their cultural and ethnic identities. Residents are trained in hospitality and basic guiding skills by villages and other concerned parties, allowing them to learn about hygiene, tourism, and conservation approaches (Thakuri, 2016). As a result of this economic growth, the Tharus are primarily concerned with establishing homestay tourism to support their livelihoods and promote a high-quality life.

Rural tourism is similarly viewed as a multidimensional, dynamic industry (Upadhayaya, 2008). It encompasses farm-based tourism and diverse farm-based vacations to maximise human welfare and happiness through sustainable socio-economic development of rural areas, reducing regional inequality and economic disparities, and contributing to poverty relief. It is increasingly used to regenerate and diversify the socio-economic landscape (Hall, 2000). It also encompasses special-interest nature and ecotourism, walking, climbing, and horseback riding vacations, adventure, educational travel, arts, and heritage tourism, and in some locations, ethnic tourism (Lane, 1994).

Rural tourism takes several forms and is pursued for a variety of reasons. One of the primary aims is developmental, promoting tourism as an engine of growth for regeneration following the agro-industrial collapse or diversification of a distant marginal agricultural area into adventure tourism or cultural tourism. Additionally, it preserves some depth in a progressively flattened world by globalisation's influences (Tanahashi, 2010). Most rural communities have been characterised as agricultural raw material production bases and extractive units for mined resources. Economic decline, agricultural restructuring, dwindling rural industrialisation, and out-migration of highly educated youth have resulted in the adoption of tourism as an alternative development strategy for rural economic and social regeneration in several western nations (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Derno 1991; Hannigan, 1994a; Pompl and Lavery, 1993; Wickens, 1999; Williams and Shaw, 1991). Accordingly, homestay affects people's social, cultural, and economic lives; moreover, it improves one's quality of life (Subedi, 2016).





Furthermore, rural tourism has the potential to facilitate the exchange of intrinsic socio-cultural values between nations. It can bridge the international divide through a variety of concepts, ideas, and views (Samantaray, 2016). Tourism is Nepal's fastest expanding business, contributing significantly to the country's economy. Indigenous cuisine, cultural practices, customs, and values are decorative in homestay tourism; both environment and culture are commoditised; commercial value is created by visitor demand. It compensates the indigenous community financially for preserving the environment and their culture (Laurie & Radcliffe, 2005). It is also an excellent way to earn foreign currency. It closes the balance of payment imbalance, generates additional tax income, stimulates the nation's economic development, and expands employment prospects. It may even open up new marketplaces for indigenous people to sell their wares, such as agricultural items and cattle (Budhathoki, 2013). Similarly, home-staying is critical for promoting sustainable community development in rural villages in developing nations like Thailand, Malaysia, and Nepal (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Thus, it has served as a tool for reducing poverty and other related problems through job creation and raising rural communities' living standards.

2.2 Homestay as Household Strategy

In Nepal, homestay plays a critical role in rural development and cultural preservation. Nepalese migrants view poverty as the root cause of a variety of social failings, including illiteracy, crime, substance abuse, and a high divorce rate. Homestay tourism has been identified as a critical strategy for regional development (Saxena et al., 2007, as cited in Robinson & O'Connor, 2013), alongside poverty eradication. The Nepalese migrants have discovered that rural communities have not wholly adopted homestays, and those are struggling to sustain them. Homestays are also a vehicle for economic development, with the potential to generate foreign exchange, create jobs, reduce income and employment disparities, strengthen ties between economic sectors, curb youth out-migration, aid in poverty alleviation, strengthen a sense of ethnic identity, protect land rights, and reduce deforestation (Devkota, 2010). Because the culture's introduction is unnecessary, homestays also have a detrimental effect on the identity of local places, resulting in cultural pollution in the village. In terms of promoting rural tourism and indigenous cultures, locals with a broader perspective and a deeper understanding have adopted homestay tourism to develop the rural community. Stakeholders from the community to the national level also participate in rural tourism to identify new approaches to create local opportunities. Thus, tourism is viewed as a potentially powerful and unique force for change in rural tourist community development (Kunwar, 2012). Its linkages to the local community are the primary focus of this study.



2.3 Homestay and Sociocultural Practices

For several generations, Naya Gaon has been primarily inhabited by the Tharus, who have their own culture and traditions. They continue to practice their ethnic, and cultural customs in the manner in which they were previously practised. Both domestic and international tourists visit Naya Gaon Homestay to gain an understanding of Tharu culture and traditions. They enjoy themselves there with the host family, relatives, friends, and colleagues due to different cultural customs. They interact with a host family and swap traditions and cultures voluntarily or unknowingly. During the visitor’s stay with the host family, they both share their cultures.

Tourism is one of the most engaging sectors globally, with guests and travellers frequently sharing their practices (Lama, 2013). Similarly, tourism firms can be sustained via the effective management of indigenous cultures and customs. Because the majority of homestay programs are located in rural areas, they have their own set of values, customs, and cultures (Bhuiyan, et al. 2011). In general, homestay operators promote indigenous cultural practices while welcoming guests into their homes, providing an opportunity for guests to interact with indigenous activities and values. The homestay program fosters communal togetherness via teamwork and the preservation of traditional social values within the community (Ibrahim & Razzaq 2011).

2.4 The Dynamics of the Nepal Tourism Market

Tourism, whether domestic or international, is vital for any country’s socio-economic development. It is formally recognised as a measurable activity, allowing for more precise analysis and more effective policymaking (WTO, 2019). It has served as a means of generating foreign currency while also assisting in the development of the national economy. It has been the principal source of funding for rural development and promoting indigenous cultures in Nepal. International tourist arrivals in Nepal totalled 1,197,000 in the fiscal year 2019. Further, Nepal Tourism Statistics (2019) indicates a 39 per cent year-on-year increase in arrivals between 2018 and 2019.

Table 1. Tourist Arrival in Nepal 2018-2019

Indicators	2018	2019	% Change
Tourist Arrivals by:			
Air	969287	995884	2.67
Land	203785	201307	1.23
Total	1173072	1197191	2.01
Average Length of Stay	12.4	12.7	2.2

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 2019

Table 1 shows the rise in visitor arrivals between 2018 and 2019. Nepal has prioritised tourism development to achieve socio-economic improvement through export profits, job creation, and infrastructure development. It has been a significant source of foreign exchange earnings and a substantial contributor to the creation of much-needed job and development prospects in Nepal. Nepalis are utilising rural tourism as a tool for managing their everyday activities and lives. Rural tourism's reach is now expanding dramatically and consuming a sizable portion of income-generating activities. It has been one of the most critical requirements for Nepal's development.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Weaver, 2006), or tourism that wisely uses and conserves resources to maintain their long-term viability (Budowski, 1976). So far, it's a form of sustainability and a process and vehicle of progress. Economic growth necessitates socio-cultural changes as a foundation for continued economic development (Rostow, 1960).

Tourism modernisation projects generated foreign currency created jobs, and promoted technology transfer (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008). Tourists continued to expand the resources upon which the tourism multiplier was constructed. Adillon (2019) presented the diamond model for sustainable tourism development as a long-term approach. A trustworthy and strong entity with decision-making capacity and representation for all tourist stakeholders, he continues by noting that a link should also exist between tourism and citizens' quality of life, as residents rely on the benefits of tourist expansion for both themselves and the community at large.

Adillon's (2019) seven-element model emphasises the importance of sustainable tourism development in promoting inhabitants' quality of life in developing nations. It also reinforces socio-cultural traditions previously accepted by distinct ethnic groups within a society. For Nepal, rural tourism has been a household strategy necessary to preserve indigenous cultures and household livelihoods. Irrespective of development theories, rural tourism is a novel technique that is furthering rural development due to the changing nature of the tourism business and shifting tourist incentives. It is also a natural transformation process (Streimikiene and Bilan, 2015). The authors opined:

A proper understanding of this process provides a better understanding of the dynamism of rural tourism development and allows identifying the main factors that have an impact on the changes in rural tourism and the selection of proper methods for their identification and assessment. (2015, p.3)



Based on this construct, scholars agree that the rural tourism development model is based on three major driving forces: supply, demand, and motivations that must be identified to properly develop rural tourism and its policies, as well as to avoid under-exploitation of natural resources and other pessimistic socio-environmental issues in rural areas. Thus, it has been the most effective approach for promoting indigenous cultures and livelihoods.

4. CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Utilising qualitative data, this study aims to investigate the research questions: (i) How does the homestay business assist the Tharu community in developing rural tourism? (ii) How is homestay tourism practised in the Tharu community? (iii) and to what extent do homestay activities assist the rural community in developing rural tourism? As a member of the Tharu community, this research was undertaken from an interpretivist standpoint. It was conducted for two years, from March 2018 to January 2020, at various seasons and times in Naya Gaon.

Primarily, the ethnographic technique was applied to comprehend the entire process of rural tourist growth, which relied on indigenous people to consume indigenous means and resources. It can be utilised to acquire a better understanding of audiences' social dynamics and emotive qualities (Mackellar, 2013). Several steps were used in this study to collect information regarding the indigenous Tharus' attitudes toward tourism. I spent two years in physical and textual areas seeking facts that could be gleaned from the study field's relationships. I attended numerous village observations and joint meetings with inhabitants for surveys that could disrupt the flow of the event experience for audiences or be made impossible by the event's structure. Thus, the ethnographic approach and participation in practices provided me access to useful embodied, situational, and practice-related knowledge (Rantala, 2011).

Participant observation requires engagement in a social situation as a participant and the creation of descriptive observations of self, others, and the setting (Mackellar (2013). Frequent visits to the Homestays to observe and comprehend Tharus' daily activities were required. During my field visits, I developed a thorough and nuanced grasp of a phenomenon, scenario, location and residents' behaviours within that milieu. It enabled me to confront and speak on often-ignored grey regions by other researchers. Through this lens, the current study examined how the indigenous Tharus, who had only a passing familiarity with tourism, perceived its development during the pre-tourism period and ultimately ran homestays in their unique manner.

Likewise, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) also benefited me to elicit information about the Homestay operation. Four important informants from the village were





purposefully chosen for their specialised knowledge and distinctive perspectives on homestay tourism development and its impact on local people's daily lives. Open-ended questions significantly helped prompt a conversation amongst respondents to facilitate the exchange of thoughts and information about the homestay operation. KIIs allowed me the freedom to further explore unique ideas and challenges. Respondent A reported a total of 42 households out of which 13 households were operating homestays to supplement their income with unique hospitality and regional cuisine. Respondent B added:

Homestay tourism has a positive impact on their daily lives. It has supported Tharus to improve its socio-economic aspects. Therefore, homestay tourism has been the primary source of income generation. (Field Notes, 2018)

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with 40 open-ended and closed-ended questions were utilised throughout the following interviews with ward officials, retired teachers, women groups, and homestay operators. All respondents emphasised the critical role of homestays in preserving and protecting indigenous culture and traditions. The interviews conveyed the findings which were the impetus for an additional examination of the village's whole social planning and policies for homestay operation. Simultaneous in-depth face-to-face interviews of participants even examined behaviours and social interactions (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Both approaches urged the participants to provide lengthy and colourful responses to the study questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

After the successful interviews with the key respondents, I also used focused group discussions (FGDs) to discover the benefits and drawbacks of the homestay tourism industry running in the neighbourhood. Several homestay operators, stakeholders, and government officials joined to respond to village lifestyles. Open-ended questions in each group enabled participants to agree, disagree, or amend the responses of their own choice (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). FGDs aided in the deciphering of themes of homestay operators who relied heavily on homestay tourism.

Case-study research is suitable for a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth examination (Creswell, 2013) that can provide a more nuanced understanding of tourism development at the local level (Kneafsey, 2000, as cited in Zielinski, 2020). This method was used to evaluate the research and elicit reliable data about rural development through homestay tourism. The growth of rural tourism has affected locals' daily economic activity. The following case studies are presented to visualise the green aspects of locals:



In Case Study 1, Respondent C was responsible for spearheading homestay tourism with a solid vision and programs, remarked:

Homestay tourism has been the prerequisite for the protection and preservation of Tharu cultures along with survival. It has been a source of income and improving lifestyles. It has also supported local people to sustain rural development along with their livelihoods. It has stopped the migration process and has also brought some positive changes to society. Thus, it has been proven as a local business for livelihood and promotion of our culture. (Field Notes, 2018)

Respondent C highlighted that homestay tourism was crucial for the promotion of livelihood and the existing local cultures. It has also been an agent of making a socio-cultural change in society. However, Respondent D notes an alternative rural tourism perspective stating:

Homestay tourism is considered a local business to depend on and to promote local cultures. Women's empowerment has been possible only because of fundamental rights and freedom guaranteed by a local business (i.e., Homestays). Since homestays were operated, women's economic status has improved. It has also guaranteed local employment by consuming maximum local resources. Now, women are more empowered and well-conscious of their domestic usage and rights. Social organisations like Mahila Samuh (Women Groups) have been established to exercise their power for social mobility. (Field Notes, 2019)

As per Respondent D in Case Study 2, Nagarik Sachetna Kendra (Civil Awareness Centre) funded by the District Development Centre, has provided villagers with financial support and free service for homestay construction. The respondent concluded with the positive impacts of homestays which empowered women socially and economically.

Similarly, Respondent E discussed the important practices made for reviving indigenous culture and language. He noted:

Labour migration is one of those factors which is adversely affecting the daily lives of the Tharu people. It is changing Tharus'

daily behaviours and practices to adjust to new modern societies. Also, they are trying hard to form a new identity leaving their own original culture and traditions. Now, the Tharu language is mixed up with various national and international languages. Despite this fact, it has transformed their entire lifestyles. They have also adopted homestays to protect and promote their existing cultures. (Field notes, 2020)

In Case study 3, Respondent E highlighted the importance of homestay tourism in reviving Tharus's existing customs and traditions. It is also seen that homestay tourism enabled them to halt migratory movements. It is regarded as one of the most lucrative sources of revenue, contributing to the improvement of local people's livelihoods and social norms. Additionally, it played a critical role in transforming indigenous societies and sustaining rural development.

Case Study 4 emphasised the primary source of income for residents after remittance receipts. Key respondents emphasised that local cultures were revitalised as a result of the local enterprises. Similarly, residents' socio-economic situation improved dramatically, and homestay operators were successful in providing their children with higher studies at school or college. The study's primary focus was on the successful operation of homestays in the local community by mobilising indigenous means and resources. Residents were establishing local possibilities for their descendants, and each of the homestay operators was laying the groundwork for achieving an end goal.

Besides these techniques, I applied the direct participation approach to understanding the Tharu community's existing cultures and traditions. In November 2018, participation in the Tharu cultural programme organised by homestay operators and stakeholders was innovative for a real understanding of local cultures. The Municipality President publicly said:

Homestay is the best strategy for the promotion of Homestay tourism to protect and preserve Tharu cultures and traditions. The Ward office will allocate the budget for the development of sustainable tourism in the village. (Field Notes, 2019)

Respondent F in Case Study 4 depicted those women and girls were mainstreamed due to their active participation in homestay operations. For them, homestay tourism has promoted indigenous cultures and traditions. It has also been crucial to the rural village's holistic development and rural economic growth.

5. RESULTS

The case studies demonstrate that homestay tourism contributes to the socio-cultural development of the local community. Out-migration was decreasing, and in-migration was increasing due to the bulk of homestay tourism attractions and the distinctive culture of Naya Gaon. A rural community's sustainability is also demonstrated through the preservation of local cultures and traditions. It advocated for more effective governmental institutions and local community capacity-building and leadership training. It has supported residents for their livelihoods. Even, the government and non-government agencies are concerned with the promotion of homestays and the increase in the number of both domestic and international tourists.

Table 2. Development patterns of homestay tourism in Naya Gaon

No	Development Patterns	Description	Examples
1	Welcome & Hospitality	Visitors are welcome with aromatic Mala (garlands) on the neck and Tika on the forehead with traditional music sung by the women groups of the village	Marigold Flowers, Cultural music, tika on the forehead, etc.
2	Homestay Tourism operations-driven by ethnic culture & traditions	Homestay tourism takes the ethnic culture & Unique lifestyles of Tharu as the main attraction	Traditional farmers, cultivation practice, fishing, Tharu cultural food and cultural dress, etc.
3	Folk cultures	Homestay tourism operations are based on a well-preserved ecological environment, landscape and folk culture	Performance of Tharu cultural dance (e.g., Jhumara Dance, Laththi (stick) dance, Mahatya Dance, Hurdungwa Dance, etc.)
4	Homestay Tourism operations led by Agricultural plantations & Processing	Homestay tourism operations are based on plantations of fruits, beverages, vegetables, tea, etc.	home products (e.g., sinki, gundruk, cabbage, cauliflower, potato, radish, greens, etc.)

5	Agro-tourism sites	Ecological farmlands, hi-tech agricultural bases, sugarcane plantations, etc.	local products (e.g., paddy, corn, lentil, etc.)
6	Ecological rural tourism attractions	Ecologically diverse flora and fauna, natural beauties, sweet and peaceful environment, etc.	Green forests, Banke National Park, jungle safari, cultural uniqueness, endangered animals like tigers, etc.
7	Benefit-sharing on operations of homestay tourism	benefits shared between homestay tourism fund & individual homestay operators	90% distributed to individual homestay operators & 10% to the homestay tourism fund
8	Homestay Tourism operation cultures, accompanied with problems accompanied with challenges, prospects & opportunities in future generation economy	homestay tourism operation faces socio-economic problems, however, there are more prospects & opportunities for a future generation, support for national incomes upgrades people's living standards	Assimilation of foreign cultures, social abuse, assault, gender discrimination, creation of local employment, rural economy, living standards, etc.
9	Homestay Tourism operations Funded by Government & non-government bodies	USAID & Rural Municipality supported residents to operate homestay tourism	USAID donated \$23478(NPR 2,700,000) & Rural Municipality Office \$ 14,782 (NPR 1,700,000)

Source: Field Visit, 2019

Table 2 outlines rural tourism development in Nepal and depicts the complete procedure of running homestays. It has been a family strategy to meet all everyday needs. It also promotes local culture and traditions, and economic success. Tharu

women are preserving social status, self-reliance and domestic rights. It is helping them improve their daily lives and apply indigenous knowledge and skills. Most importantly, it is helping in poverty reduction and eradication of societal biases and gender inequity.

6. FINDINGS

Based on the empirical study, I found the village is inhabited by the majority of Tharus. A total of 13 households were engaged in homestay operations as a strategy for the promotion of their culture and tradition. The USAID, through the District Development Committee, has supported the village with a total budget of NPR. 2,700,000 and Rural Municipality Office donated NPR 1,700,000 for operating homestays.

On my first visit to the village, I observed an increasing number of labour migrants and some positive changes. For example, *Nagarik Sachetna Kendra* (Public Awareness Centre) funded by DDC, consists of 30 members. This centre helps promote the rural economy and empower women. The women groups also support homestay tourism with human labour and by establishing a cultural building. Women are taking a primary role to reform and developing rural development.

6.1 Rural Tourism Development

The Homestay operators have established a community tourism fund for the holistic development of the village and the promotion of Tharu culture and customs. Respondent G said:

Homestay operators receive 90% of the total benefit and hand over 10% to the Community Tourism Fund for promoting homestay tourism. Cultural programmes and events are conducted to promote homestay tourism and enhance regional and national networks via advertisements, pamphlets, media, etc. We also call the local authorities like District Federation, CFCC (Community Forest Coordination Committee) field officers, politicians, and government officials for discussing strategies and policies to promote rural tourism and develop it. Thus, we all are giving more emphasis on youth self-employment to stop labour migration and also to be self-reliant. (Field Notes, 2019)

I observed residents for the first time; they were engaged in agriculture to fulfil food crops, while some young villagers were outmigrants for sake of economic growth. But, the left-out populations were giving high priority to homestay tourism for creating

local and/or self-employment. The residents are promoting homestay tourism and are marketing local products in the labour markets near Kohalpur city. They are actively participating in various training to develop their skills and enhance agricultural products. Local media are also playing a significant role to advertise local cultures, and products and promoting them for the sustainability of homestay tourism.

During data collection, I observed the media team which was actively participating in the cultural programme organised for tourists' enjoyment. They disseminated positive aspects and potentialities of Homestay Tourism. The villagers were emphasising community development and tourism sustainability. They were also harnessing organic farming to promote local products and cultures. Besides, they prioritised promoting community-based tourism because it provided them with financial support to needy people and assisted in maintaining their economic activities.

The Tharus were operating homestays for their livelihood. But they highly prioritised local agricultural products for promoting their culture and custom. They focused on promoting alternative and local food items such as *Gundruk* (dry leaves of radish and cabbage), *Dhikri* (made up of paddy flour), *Ghongi* (snail), fish, and pork meat, mouse meat, dove meat, etc. for giving tourists an actual identity. The community tourism fund was established to provide the residents with financial support to help them manage their economic activities and regulate the local businesses.

6.2 Challenges

While collecting data, I experienced some external challenges in the village, which is located near the East-West (Mahendra) Highway. However, the inside road is not pitched; improperly managed, the village is not well-settled with access to each corner. Due to this reason, tourists feel uncomfortable while visiting beautiful places. Likewise, there is a lack of suitable modern communication technologies. As a result, tourists feel disconnected and alien. They show less interest in visiting rural homestays. As the village lies amidst Banke National Park, unexpected incidents can happen at night time. Therefore, one should be alert while walking at night time. Being a little far from the market of Kohalpur city, the villagers feel uncomfortable reaching the market most often to purchase clothing and foodstuffs for guests' convenience. Due to these difficulties, tourists are not much interested in visiting the homestays.

Homestay households find some guests in difficult situations during their stay. Some tourists unexpectedly come to visit homestays and long for a stay. But the households have to serve them delicious food on time. Due to the unpreparedness for such things, the host family feels awkward satisfying them. Similarly, the households have also experienced some guests coming with sexual intentions causing females to feel unsafe.



Conversely, homestay households also face internal problems. They believe that their houses, resembling a typical local culture, are not convenient for all guests. The houses are made of mud, and bamboo and polished with cow's dung. These houses have small ventilator-like windows. The water might leak from the grassroots during winter. The toilets are not attached, and the bathrooms are open. In the rooms, there are no luxury beds, television, filter and solar lights. All households have not received the necessary training to enhance their servicing skills.

Naya Gaon Homestay (NGH) members lack digital cameras to make documentaries of their cultures and events to promote their homestays. They also have no separate Museum to show their rare cultural tools and ornaments. NGH arranges cultural shows and dances as per guests' demands. They, however, arrange shows in different exhibitions, and only a few women wear their cultural attires and ornaments in their performances. Thus, it makes the entire show less interesting and unfruitful.

As guests want to experience local foods, including *Dhikri* (rice flour), *Ghonghi* (snail), local chicken, pigeon flesh, pork meat, local prawn, and Tharu foods (snails and crab) are unavailable during off-seasons. Households observe most of the guests ask the host family for local chicken for which they may need to travel so far to find it if not available locally. Likewise, the households can not speak the English language while communicating with foreign guests. Due to language problems, they can not share necessary things with them. Thus, the guests get upset and feel reluctant to stay there and seek another place for their abode.

6.3 Future Prospects

The village is located amidst Banke National Park, which is easily accessible to tourists for viewing the natural beauty and experiencing local culture and tradition. It can also be a future tourist destination in terms of local unique culture and traditions. Homestay has created local employment for local people. Since it was established, residents have been self-reliant and also have upgraded their economy. They have been able to improve their living standards. They are now heading towards protecting their cultures and maintaining their livelihoods. In this line, Respondent H opined:

Homestays have been the secondary source of good earnings after the receipt of remittances. The operation of homestays is becoming a successful local business to support us in one way or another. We are adopting it to enhance our living standards. (Field Notes, 2020)





Due to migratory movements, no cultures are found pure, every culture is getting mixed up with each other. Therefore, Tharus are actively engaged in operating homestays for their income-generating activities and promoting local cultures. Since homestays were operated in the village, Tharus have been mobilising local means and resources. Respondent I added:

Formerly, we had been adopting agriculture as the main profession for our survival, but now we have changed our profession and have operated homestays as an alternative source of income. It has brought us several changes in our locality. (Field Notes, 2018)

I perceived the smooth development of local people throughout my field visits. Each household has an upgraded socio-economic status. Due to its high potentiality, they have been focusing on rural tourism development to sustain their economic growth. It has been a household strategy to regulate rural development activities. The residents are transforming society into a new development model.

In addition, Tharus will have more opportunities to expand their local products, cultures and markets. They will successfully maintain their actual identity and culture. Through homestays operation, local entrepreneurs will strengthen the local economy. Similarly, residents will get rid of *Kamaiyas* (Bonded labourers) and *Sukumbashis* (Slums) in the village. They will experience their freedom, life and fundamental rights. They will practice their rights to preserve their local cultures and biodiversity to maintain human lives. In addition, they will have good connections with city life for widening local markets. There will be an open platform for youths to convey youth development programmes and transform social phenomena. Thus, rural tourism will be the main focus to promote local business based on indigenous knowledge and skills.

7. DISCUSSION

Rural tourism is considered the most preferable local business for the improvement of a household's economy. It has also been a household strategy to promote local culture and tradition. In the Nepalese context, remittances and tourism are the primary sources of upgrading economic growth. These factors also directly contribute to the national economy as foreign currency is gained from these factors. In a broad sense, remittances and tourism are fully supporting Nepalese Gross Domestic Products (NGDP) with 25.4% (Nepal Rastra Bank, FY 2018/19) and 7.9 % (Nepal Tourism Board, 2019), respectively.

Table 2 shows the development of homestay tourism which is essential for the promotion of rural development. The residents cordially welcome tourists with



garlands and souvenirs as God. It is carrying direct impacts on local development programmes and strategies for sustaining long-term development for human welfare. It will also assist in maintaining balanced regional development in Nepal. Besides all these potentialities, Naya Gaon Homestay is believed to be one factor in transforming the socio-economic life of local people and building holistic development in the nation. It is also the most favourable local business for the residents to protect and promote local cultures. Most importantly, it is improving the socioeconomic status of the residents along with their livelihoods.

On the other hand, this study connects with previous scholarship on rural tourism, but in different ways and patterns. Similarly, it investigates rural tourism through an interpretative approach to understanding the people's thoughts and perceptions on operating rural homestays and its contribution to the regional economy.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses how rural tourism is developing and contributing to local people's livelihoods. In the village, the homestay has been the primary choice of the villagers to improve their livelihoods. It is also creating self-employment and balancing local labour markets in the village. Tharus have been significantly improving their living standards since they adopted homestay as a household strategy and the most favourable local business. Each household has given a high preference to modify traditional systems and sustain economic growth. However, there are big challenges for them to operate a homestay. They are operating homestays based on indigenous knowledge and skills, and are not fully supporting rural tourism. This is a competitive age; therefore, there must be optimum use of modern technologies to make changes in rural tourism development. Based on the empirical research study, the author observes that Tharus are taking homestay as the mainstay of living. As they are involved in homestays operation, the ratios of labour migration are gradually decreasing, and they are becoming economically more empowered and getting rid of *Kamaiyas* (Bonded labourers) and *Sukumbasi* (Slums). Thus, homestay tourism has provided them with the best solutions for economic growth and transformation of the socio-cultural aspects of the village.

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