Migration and Cultural Transformation in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal: Urban Diversity and Evolving Community Practices

Madhav Bhattarai*
Faculty of Technology & Environment, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket, Thailand
Everest Research Center for Development Partners Pvt. Ltd., Nepal

Hari Prasad Ghimire*
Faculty of Environmental Management, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand
Everest Research Center for Development Partners Pvt. Ltd., Nepal

Aayam Bhattarai
Bauhaus University, Germany

Abstract:
Kathmandu Valley has transformed from being a city dominated by Newars to the most diverse city in Nepal. Community practices, identity, language, religion, housing, public space, and living heritage have been affected by internal migration, educational mobility, labor-market concentration, peri-urban expansion, and global cultural flows. The paper carries out a structured secondary data analysis of 16 key sources (10 scholarly journal articles and 6 official or institutional sources) along with the 2021 National Population and Housing Census, UNESCO, and UN-Habitat-based research on the Kathmandu area. The synthesis highlights five interlocked transformations that are occurring: first, the increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity; second, the adaptation of migrant associations, festivals, foodways, and mutual-aid networks in cities; third, the pressure on Newar institutions and place-based rituals in the context of land conversion, altered housing, commercialization and generational change; fourth, hybrid cultural practices and multiple forms of urban belonging; and fifth, ongoing inequalities in cultural participation by caste, class, tenure, gender, and migrant status. The review contends that cultural change in Kathmandu Valley is the result of the dynamic interplay between demographic movement and transformation of urban space, institutions, markets and governance. It suggests a cultural-inclusion approach that relies on migration-sensitive planning, multilingual services, common public space, support of community institutions, protection of living heritage, and cultural data improvement. The findings highlight cultural transformation as a key urban-governance concern and provide a policy perspective on Kathmandu Valley as an emerging globalizing metropolitan city.

Keywords:
Cultural transformation, internal migration, Kathmandu Valley, multiculturalism, urban diversity, urban identity.