

“When Tourists Come to This Place, I Get Job”  
**The Impact of Tourism on The Livelihoods of  
Tharu Households in Bachhauli**



*Boat navigator taking tourists from one shore to the other. Sauraha, Chitwan. (c) Léonie Borel.*

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**WORD COUNT:** 9,998

**MARCH 2020**

**Abstract**

Since the opening of Chitwan National Park in 1973, the tourism sector within the Chitwan District has continued to grow. Increases in job opportunities, and changes in livelihoods, have accompanied this expansion. This research sheds light on the significance of tourism in the livelihood strategies of Tharu households situated in Bachhauli since the sector's expansion in the area. The Tharu, a historically marginalized ethnic group indigenous to Chitwan, are heavily involved in tourism, working in functions such as nature guides, hotel staff, and more. Through this research, we aim to bridge the gap between two frameworks: tourism as a tool for development and livelihood diversification. We focus on three core questions: (1) Where do Tharu households source their income from? (2) What role does tourism play in the livelihoods of Tharu households? (3) What are Tharu attitudes towards tourism?

Through conducting a combination of household livelihood surveys and semi-structured interviews in Bachhauli, we were able to determine that attitudes towards the growing tourism sector are generally positive. Tourism is perceived to increase the incomes of households, provide job opportunities for Tharu people and, to an extent, preserve Tharu culture. Furthermore, our findings indicate that more than half of Tharu households have family members employed in tourism, and that roughly 87% of households engage in subsistence farming, indicating that the two often go hand-in-hand in local livelihood strategies. Participants note that tourism is seasonal, meaning that incomes in the tourism sector during season are quite high, but out of season, or if any unpredicted shocks occur, incomes decrease significantly, or are even rendered non-existent. This further leads us to conclude that many Tharu households tend to diversify their livelihoods, and engage in subsistence farming, to spread the risk amplified by the seasonal and unstable nature of the tourism sector.

### जब यहाँ पर्यटकहरू आउछन, मैले काम पाउछु : बछौलीमा थारु घरपरिवारको जिविकोपार्जनमा पर्यटनको प्रभाव

सन १९७३ मा चितवन राष्ट्रिय निकुञ्जको स्थापना पछि, चितवनमा पर्यटन विकाश लगातार भैरहेको छ । निकुञ्जको विकासले जागिरको अवसरहरू बढाएको छ साथसाथै जिविकोपार्जनमा परिवर्तन भएको छ । यस अध्ययनले बछौलीमा बसोवास गर्ने थारुहरूको जिविकोपार्जन रणनितिमा पर्यटनको महत्वको वारेमा प्रकाश पारिको छ । ऐतिहासिक रूपमा पछाडि पारिएका चितवनका थारु समुदाय पर्यटनमा क्षेत्रमा काम गरिरहेका छन जस्तो कि नेचर गाइड, होटलका कर्मचारी अदि । यस अध्ययन मार्फत हामीले दुइओटा संरचना बीचको दुरीलाई जोड्ने प्रयास गरेका छौं : पर्यटन विकासको माध्यम हो र यसले जिविकोपार्जनलाई विविधिकरण गर्न पददत गर्दछ । हामीले मुख्यतः तीन ओटा प्रश्नहरूमा एकतृत गरेका छौं : १) थारु घरपरिवारको आम्दानीको श्रोत कहाँबाट आउछ ? २) पर्यटनले थारु घरपरिवारमा जिविकोपार्जनको भुमिका कस्तो खेलेको छ ? ३) पर्यटन क्षेत्रमा थारुहरूको अवधारणा कस्तो छ ? घरधुरी सर्वेक्षण र अन्तवार्ताको माध्यमबाट हामीले के निब्रयोल गरेका छौं भने, बढ्दो पर्यटन विकाशमा मानिसहरूको धाराणा सकरात्मक छ । पर्यटन क्षेत्रले मानिसहरूको आम्दानीको श्रोत बढाईदिने, कामको अवसरहरू प्रदान गर्ने र थारु संस्कृतिको सम्बद्धन गर्ने गरेको आम मानिसको बुझाई रहेको छ । हाम्रो अध्ययनले के देखाउछ भने, आधा भन्दा बढी घरधुरीका थारुहरू कुनै न कुनै रूपमा पर्यटन क्षेत्रमा अवद्ध छन र ७८ प्रतिशत थारु घरधुरी निर्वाहमुखि कृषि गर्छन र पर्यटन र कृषि दुबै स्थानिय जिविकोपार्जनको रणनिति भएको छ । यस अध्ययनमा सहभागीहरूले भन्छन पर्यटन मौसमी छ भनाईको तातपर्य धेरै पर्यटक आउने सिजनमा आम्दानी बढी हुने र कम पर्यटकहरू आउने सिजनमा आम्दानी कम हुने वा आम्दानी नै नहुने अझ कुनै अप्रत्यासित घटनाले आम्दानी नाटकिय रूपमा घट्ने वा विल्कुल आम्दानी नहुने हुन्छ । यस किसिमको अस्थिर पर्यटनले थारुहरूले आफ्नो जिविकोपार्जनको श्रोतलाई विविधीकरण गरेका छन र पर्यटन क्षेत्रमा अवद्ध थारुहरू पर्यटन क्षेत्रको अस्थिरताको जोखिमलाई कम गर्न निर्वाहमुखि खेतिपातीमा पनि आवद्ध छन ।

## Acknowledgments

First, we would like to thank the local people and everyone who participated in our field research, for taking the time to answer our questions and for inviting us into their homes. Their hospitality and willingness to share their story with us was truly heart-warming, our research would not have been possible without them. We met incredible people and were truly amazed by each and every one of them. We would like to thank Sanjay Chaudhary for sharing his knowledge of Tharu culture, his constant assistance, and for coordinating this field trip with the University of Copenhagen in Chitwan, Nepal.

We would especially like to thank our friend and research assistant, Simrela Chaudhary, for sharing her knowledge about the area and Tharu culture, and her advice and translation throughout this research process. Her level of energy, and willingness to constantly work in the field were crucial during these two weeks in Sauraha.

Lastly, thank you to our supervisor, Associate Professor Rune Bolding Bennike, for his constructive guidance and support during this research project, as well as for aiding in organizing this field trip. Finally, we would like to truly thank Professor Helle Bundgaard, for sharing her unique passion for field research.

Our field research in Chitwan has been an incredible learning experience for all of us, both on an academic and personal level. We are truly grateful for this time in Nepal and for the opportunity University of Copenhagen gave us.

*धन्यवाद Dhanyabad,*

*Tak,*

Thank you.



***The team, on their last day in Sauraha, Chitwan.***  
*(From Left to Right: Sandra, Chee, Simrela, Federica, Léonie and Hugo)*

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## **1. Introduction**

Tourism is ranked the world's third-largest export category by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, accounting for 7% of global exports (UNWTO, 2019). Furthermore, scholars have attested that tourism can be a preferred tool for economic development and poverty alleviation in the Global South, as it promotes job opportunities, improves livelihoods and can influence the socio-cultural progress of a society (Cárdenas-García and Pulido-Fernández, 2019; Sokhanvar, Çiftçioğlu and Javid, 2018; Hummel and Van Der Duim, 2012). With tourism accounting for 7.9% of the national economy (WTTC, 2019) and 11% of formal employment creation in 2018 (Ministry of Finance, 2019), the government of Nepal sees the industry as central to the country's market-led development strategy (Bennike, 2019). This has prompted campaigns such as the recent "Visit Nepal 2020," meant to brand Nepal as a travel and vacationer destination, while enhancing local tourism as a profitable industry (Visit Nepal 2020, 2019). As the sector has continued to grow, the Chitwan District within the Terai region of Nepal has seen an increase in job opportunities, and changes in livelihoods, of its local inhabitants. These changes have impacted various ethnic groups residing in the area, especially the indigenous population of the Tharus, who were the main inhabitants of the sparsely populated and mostly forest-covered Terai region until the second half of the 20th century (Guneratne, 2016; Robertson, 2018).

Due to the spread of a virulent strain of malaria, people from other regions of Nepal used to avoid the Chitwan valley, whilst the Tharus, that compromised over 90% of the population, adapted to living with the disease for generations (Guneratne, 2016; Robertson, 2018). After the successful eradication of malaria in Chitwan in the mid 1950s through government and humanitarian intervention, the forest areas were cleared for agriculture (Sugden, Seddon and Raut 2017). This prompted in-migration of the ethnic population of Hill people, from the hills into the Chitwan area and the displacement of the Tharus, forcing many of them to become bonded-laborers (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Robertson, 2018).

Since the establishment of the Chitwan National Park (CNP), the number of foreign tourists visiting the park has continued to grow, achieving 139,125 in 2017 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2019). The expansion of tourism around the park has resulted in more Tharu becoming heavily involved in the industry, working as nature guides, drivers, and hotel and restaurant staff. Previous literature has noted reinforced social differentiation between Tharus and Hill migrants, often resulting in an unequal distribution of tourism benefits (Pandit, 2012a; Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). This holds relevant for Bachhauli, located beside the CNP, in which many tourists find accommodation and where

much of the economic spillovers of the active tourism sector are experienced (PO1 - Appendix A). Thus, tourism has become vital for the livelihoods of people residing in the area. Taking into consideration that the Tharus are indigenous to the area and the growing tourism sector in Chitwan, it is imperative to assess livelihood changes experienced by the Tharus.

Against this backdrop, this report examines **the role of the tourism industry in the livelihood strategies of the Tharu households in the Bachhauli**. Our research aims to shed light on the significance of tourism in the livelihoods of Tharu households in the area, as well as the changes in household livelihood strategies since its introduction. In doing so, we focus on three core questions: *(1) Where do Tharu households source their income from? (2) What role does tourism play in the livelihoods of Tharu households? (3) What are Tharu attitudes towards tourism?*

In analyzing the questions above, our report first delves into the historical background of Chitwan in relation to agrarian changes and the regional development of tourism. Next, the analytical frameworks of tourism as a tool for development and livelihood diversification are reviewed to assess the relationship between tourism and livelihood strategies in developing countries. Then we outline our methodology, delving into our qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as limitations and ethics of our research. Subsequently, our analysis is presented through the lens of the frameworks previously mentioned and we argue that although tourism is one of the main sources of income among Tharu households in Bachhauli, the seasonality and unpredictability of the industry leads to the adoption of multiple livelihoods, such as agriculture for subsistence, shopkeeping, and more. Additionally, with the industry expanding in the area, Tharu culture has been incorporated into tourism activities, bringing various socio-cultural changes among the Tharus. We therefore also argue that these changes lead to a debate about the benefits and impacts of tourism for the Tharus. In conclusion, we summarize our findings and discuss the need for further research on the role of tourism in livelihoods and livelihood diversification strategies within developing countries. Whilst our report does include Personal Observations (PO) and interpretations at times, it is not our intention to make generalizations of phenomena nor the people of the Chitwan District.

## **2. Historical Background**

### **2.1. Agrarian History of Nepal and Chitwan**

Nepal has displayed characteristics of an agrarian structure from the Marxist notion of 'semi-feudalism', in which landowners exerted control of production with political, ideological and economic

power over a peasant majority, and surplus from production that remained was utilized for consumption rather than productive reinvestment, under coercion rather than laws of commodity exchange (Marx, 1932 as cited in Sugden, 2016). Semi-feudalism has been deeply rooted in Nepal's history through similar forms, and has continued into the present day (Sugden et al., 2017).

Pre-dating the 1950's, Tharu society displayed a semi-feudal system by seeing a division of three social classes: the *jimidars*, the *raiti*, and the *bahariya*. The state owned the land and Tharu farmers, known as *raiti*, cultivated it as tenants. At the top of the social pyramid were the *jimidars*, responsible for tax collection. At the bottom were the *bahariya*, a servant class without land that worked for tenant farmers in exchange for food and clothing (Guneratne, 2016). The local economy was largely unmonetized and based on subsistence crops, while cash was used for other essentials, including land taxes and consumption of market items (Guneratne, 2016). Tharus relied on herds of animals grazing freely in surrounding pasture lands and fishes in the river for their protein. The forest acted as a source of wood and grass for cooking, basket production, and the housing construction system (Guneratne, 2016).

## **2.2. Political and Economic Changes Affecting the Tharus**

Following the abolition of the Rana regime in 1951, the economic and social system changed drastically. In the 1950s, under the context of the Cold War and a political revolution in Kathmandu, the United States and World Health Organization (WHO) collaborated with the national government to undertake a development plan for the Terai region (Sugden et al., 2017). This included a malaria control programme through the use of DDT, the construction of roads and the abolishment of the old system of land tenure. (Robertson, 2018; Guneratne, 2016). Land was redistributed amongst farmers in the region, after being tenants of the state for years earlier, and entitlements to land were assigned, resulting in hundreds of thousands of Hill people migrating to the valley. The Tharu went from being the main ethnicity in the region to a minority of less than 14 percent within two decades (Guneratne, 2016). Unlike some of the Hill migrants, most of the Tharu were illiterate and uneducated, thus did not fully grasp the extent of the new laws nor their rights, having negative consequences on their land tenure in a short period of time (Guneratne, 2016).

## **2.3. Development of Tourism in Chitwan**

The establishment of the Chitwan National Park in 1973 accelerated the development of tourism within the region. Following the opening of the park, the region slowly became a main attraction for

national and international tourism due to its natural beauty. However, this development came at the cost of resettling hundreds of Tharu families that used to live inside the borders of the park (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Guneratne, 2016). Moreover, as many of our informants mentioned, the creation of the national park strictly limited the access of the local population to the reserve and its resources, impacting the production of handmade basketry, the daily collection of wood, and the traditional housing construction system.

The process through which peasant and indigenous populations, such as the Tharu, partially lost the rights to access land and resources, has been described by scholars as a process of *accumulation by dispossession* (Sugden, 2019; Schmid, 2015; Harvey 2003). This notion implies the physical or symbolic removal of rights in such a dominant and hierarchical way that leads to loss and proletarianization for some and the accumulation of capital for others, changing the socio economic relationships between different groups from pre-capitalism to a market-led economy (Schmid, 2015). Nevertheless, in absence of a welfare state and under unstable forms of waged labour, the traditional farming sector continues working as one of the main household livelihood strategies in wider Nepal (Paudel et al., 2017; Gautam and Andersen, 2016; Pandit, 2012b).

Similarly, changes in the socio economic system came rigged with changes in lifestyles and consumption habits. As Guneratne (2016) explains, the emergence of new non-homemade goods and services and costs associated with education and construction of brick houses, drove the monetization of the economy. Thus, Tharu families that once relied on gathering and agriculture as main livelihood strategies are compelled today to look for income-generating jobs. In Bachhauli, a growing tourism sector, increasingly integrated to the national and transnational capital, seems to be one of the best options. Therefore, Tharus in the area are heavily reliant on tourism for their livelihoods, regardless of direct or indirect involvement in the industry.

### **3. Literature Review and Analytical Framework**

#### **3.1. Tourism as a Tool for Development**

The relationship between tourism and development is fundamental to the larger study of tourism, and is an important framework to locate this research project within. In the 1950s and 1960s, the early popular liberal academic approach viewed tourism as a potential modernisation strategy that could help newly independent countries in the Global South earn foreign exchange (Hummel and Van Der Duim,

2012). In the 1970s, tourism was highly promoted around the world, with the World Bank leading the way by financing infrastructure projects and providing credit for foreign investments (Hummel and Van Der Duim, 2012). Nowadays, the industry represents a major sector of the global economy, and is considered an important driver of development and economic growth. Scholars have attested that tourism is an effective tool for economic growth as it promotes job opportunities and increases foreign exchange (Cárdenas-García and Pulido-Fernández, 2019; Sokhanvar, et al., 2018; Inchausti-Sintes, 2015; Castro, Molina and Pablo, 2013, Zhao and Brent Ritchie, 2007; Balaguer and Cantavella-Jorda, 2002). Indeed, in 2018, tourism represented 10.4% of the World GDP (8.8 trillion USD), and supported 1 in 10 jobs on the planet (WTTC, 2019).

For a long time, the ultimate goal of development through the promotion of tourism was achieving economic growth (Salam, 2014). The emphasis on pursuing economic goals within the discourse surrounding tourism as a development tool led to the prioritization of trickle-down economics, leading policy makers in many developing countries to focus on expanding the tourism sector, rather than focusing on goals to achieve poverty alleviation (Zhao and Brent Ritchie, 2007; UNWTO, 2002). Yet, as studied by international organizations, the real impact of tourism does not reside only in its overall contribution to economic growth (Hummel and Van Der Duim, 2012). The development of the tourism sector can lead to poverty alleviation and improvement of quality of life in the Global South, hence improving livelihoods and socio-economic conditions (Cárdenas-García and Pulido-Fernández, 2019). The convergence of tourism and poverty studies in the early 2000s (Hummel and Van Der Duim, 2012), reflects an essential change in the philosophy of tourism development and poverty alleviation within academia and policy work.

International organizations started to embrace this vision of ‘pro-poor tourism’ (PPT), defined as: “...tourism that generates benefits for the poor” (Roe and Urquhart, 2001). The World Tourism Organisation (WTO), stated that “...tourism can be one of the few opportunities for the development of the poor” (UNWTO, 2002:1). However, poverty does not only mean inadequate income and human development. It also embraces notions of vulnerability, lack of voice, power, and representation (World Bank, 2018). Due to the multidimensional dimension of poverty, understanding tourism and development in terms of poverty alleviation and improvement of livelihoods remains a challenge. Furthermore, the mismatch between research and practice highlights the need to delve further into how tourism participates in the socio-economic development of a given country (Salam, 2014; Hummel and Van Der Duim, 2012).

As previously stated in our introduction, the government of Nepal sees the tourism industry as central to the country's market-led development strategy (Bennike, 2019). The country has embraced 'pro-poor' tourism development interventions for the past two decades (Sofield, Bauer, De Lacy, Lipman, and Daugherty, 2004 as cited in Bennike, 2019). In particular, Nepal has launched the 'Visit Nepal 2020' campaign, meant to brand Nepal as a travel destination, while enhancing local tourism as a profitable industry (Visit Nepal 2020, 2019). Through implementing this campaign, Nepal hopes to improve its global competitiveness through investments, infrastructure development, environment and wildlife conservation and increase its service standard, with the objective of "developing the tourism industry as a key economic development strategy of the country" (Visit Nepal 2020, 2019). By stating the improvement of the "...livelihoods of the people [...] and generating employment in the rural areas" (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2009: 9), as a main objective of its campaign, Nepal embraces the vision of tourism for socio-economic development.

### **3.2. Livelihood Diversification Strategies**

Many households in developing countries and rural contexts tend to depend on a range of livelihood activities, rather than on single activities (Rahut, Ali, Kassie, Marenja and Basnet, 2014). Hosting a range of livelihood activities is applicable to many Nepali households (Maharjan and Issahaku, 2014; Rahut et al., 2014). A livelihood "...compromises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living" (Chambers and Conway, 1992: 6). Livelihood diversification is defined as "...the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living (Ellis, 1998: 4). It is important to note that though this definition mentions rural households, that livelihood diversification is neither just a rural nor only a developing country phenomenon; it is a well-documented survival strategy of urban inhabitants in developing countries and farming households in developed countries (Ellis, 1998). Livelihood diversification is traditionally seen as a temporary decision, or a phenomenon associated with the struggle for survival in a declining economy. Yet, past literature has shown that diversification may not always be temporary and that it can also be associated with livelihoods under improving economic conditions (Collier, 1998; Preston, 1989 as cited in Ellis, 1998). Ultimately, diversification may occur as a deliberate household strategy (Stark, 1991 as cited in Ellis, 1998) or as an involuntary response to crisis (Davies, 1996 as cited in Ellis, 1998).

Households tend to diversify, rather than specialize, their livelihoods either to reduce financial risk and poverty (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Alderman and Paxon, 1992 as cited in Rahut et al. 2014) or to enhance the return to labor, thus increasing household income and well-being (Rahut et al., 2014). In a study done on rural livelihood diversification strategies in Nepal by Rahut et al. (2014), it was found that education, ethnicity, and location play an important role in livelihood diversification outside agriculture. Households with higher levels of education were able to more easily diversify into non-farm activities with higher returns. Secondly, households located closer to markets had more opportunities to diversify their livelihoods portfolio. Thirdly, the study found that ethnic groups in lower castes, e.g. the Magar, Limbu, Tharu, and others, were more confined to farming as compared to the Chhetri, due to caste system traditions and lower educational levels.

In many areas of the world, the tourism sector operates under the constraints of seasonality which can explain many of the patterns of diversification and non-agricultural earnings. Generally, seasonality is defined as: "...returns to labor in both on-farm activities and off-farm labor markets vary during the year, causing seasonal changes in occupation as labor time is switched from lower to higher return activities" (Ellis, 1998: 11). This rings true for both the agriculture sector, due to environmental seasonal changes, and the tourism sector, as tourist numbers vary based on the seasonality of the tourist activities in the area. Furthermore, livelihood diversification decisions can be further impacted by the introduction of tourism, as when tourism is introduced in an area, it "...competes for the use of scarce resources, such as land, water, labor, energy, and waste assimilation capacity...and even with uses that require that the resources not be consumed, such as nature preservation..." (Tao and Wall, 2009: 90). With tourism activities infiltrating the economy and other areas of society, households often decide to diversify into income-generating activities within the sector. However, although tourism may dominate the economies of many destinations and the incomes of many individuals, it is seldom the sole source (Tao and Wall, 2009: 90). As previously mentioned, due to the seasonality of the sector and the perceived risk of the 'newness' of the sector, many communities still perceive employment in the sector to be 'risky' (Tao and Wall, 2009).

In a case study located in Shanmei, Taiwan, Tao and Wall illustrate how the growing tourism sector in the area has resulted in further livelihood diversification of local households into income-generating activities. The creation of Danayigu Ecological Park in 1995 has spurred the recent growth of the tourism sector in the region, based on a combination of pre-existing natural and cultural attractions. In

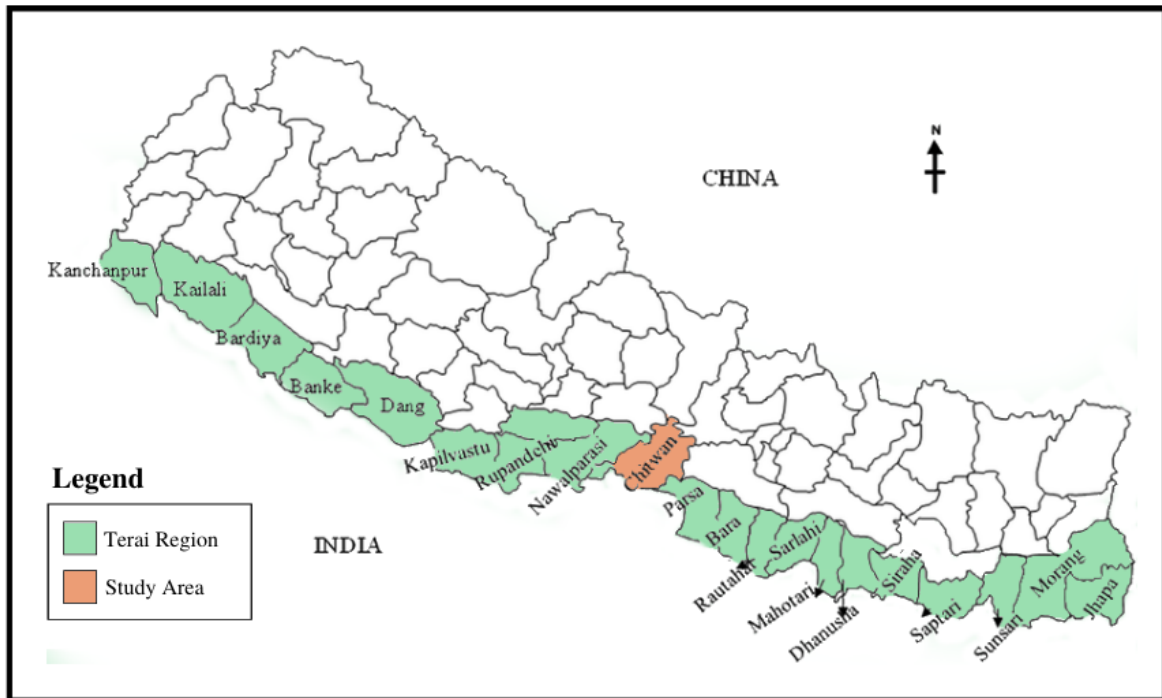
2009, between 17.3% and 29.8% of the local population worked in tourism, depending on the season (Tao and Wall, 2009). There has been a significant change in lifestyles in Shamei, where villagers have expanded from traditional, predominantly subsistence hunting and gathering, slash and burn agriculture, and fishing to current mixed livelihood activities that commonly incorporate tourism (Tao and Wall, 2009). Villagers report generally positive attitudes towards tourism, with many stating that the sector has offered significant employment opportunities, directly and indirectly, from Danayigu Park, and has “...greatly and positively” impacted Shanmei villagers’ livelihoods (Tao and Wall, 2009: 94). Tao and Wall conclude that tourism provides opportunities for both farm and non-farm diversification and that it builds on, and helps to preserve, natural resources and culture. However, migration still tends to be a favored diversification strategy in the village, as tourism is still seen as a fragile component of the economy because of its seasonality and susceptibility to shocks. Thus, while livelihood diversification into tourism activities provides more opportunities to earn income, the seasonality of the sector still paints it as a rather unstable option.

With the tourism industry continuing to grow in Chitwan, livelihood strategies will be impacted and further livelihood diversification into the industry will likely occur, as seen in case studies from other developing countries. Therefore, our research aims to bridge the gap between two analytical frameworks: tourism as a tool for development and livelihood diversification. By analyzing the role of tourism in the livelihood strategies of the Tharus, we strive to address the lack of case studies on livelihood diversification in developing countries with expansive tourism industries.

#### **4. Methodology**

We utilized a **mixed methods** approach, defined as integrating both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study, based on the assumption that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves to gain a deep and exhaustive understanding of a situation (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). Hence, we collected quantitative and qualitative data to analyze livelihood strategies, and socio-economic impacts of tourism on the Tharu households around Ward #6 within the Ratnanagar Municipality of the Chitwan District, located in the central part of the Terai region in Nepal (See Figure 1). This region, included in the Bachhauli Village Development Committee (VDC) until 2014 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020), consists of the villages of Bachhauli, Jankauli, Dorangi and Sauraha, among others (See figure 2). Henceforth, we refer to this area as ‘Bachhauli’ in our research. Furthermore, we adopted a focus on the household level throughout our work, defining a household as “a small group of

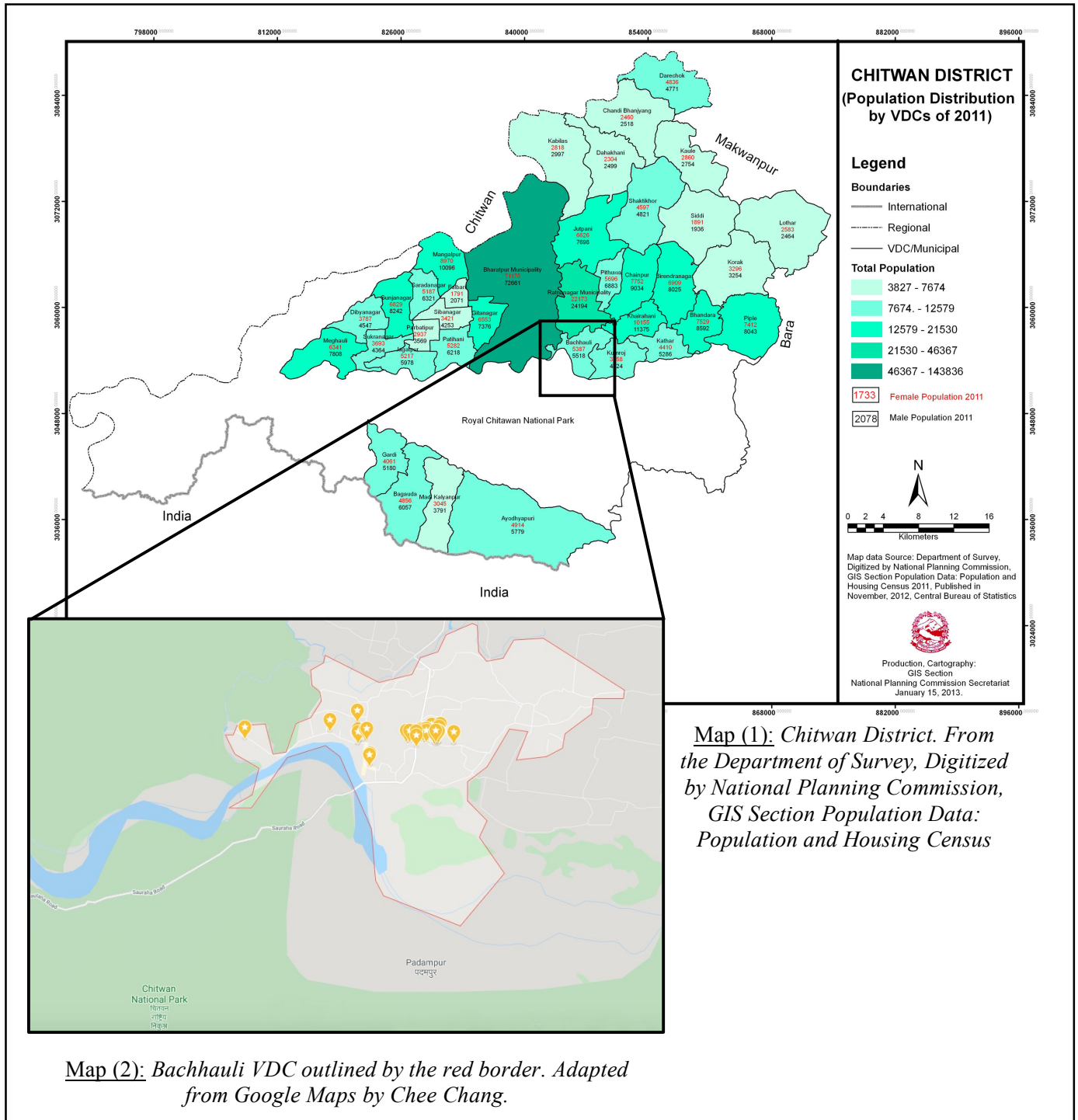
persons who share the same living accommodation, who pool some, or all, of their income and wealth and who consume certain types of goods and services collectively” (UNSD, 1993). In the context of Tharu households, Guneratne (2016: 95) describes the traditional structure as the “...head of a household is typically [the] oldest male member” while his sons and their families, and his unmarried daughters live with him. Such large households were traditionally structured in such a way to adapt to 'labor necessary to farming' (Guneratne, 2016: 95).



**Figure 1:** Map of the Terai Region (as adapted from Yadav et al., 2011)

An **Exploratory Sequential Design** was implemented, to apply an element of flexibility, in recognition of time constraints, to our data collection. The first phase included the collection and analysis of qualitative information through exploratory semi-structured interviews with inhabitants of Bachhauli. This helped us to determine variables for the collection of quantitative data in the following phase. The rationale for this lies in first exploring the topic before deciding what variables need to be measured (Mihás and Odum Institute, 2019). The exploration of variables resulted in the second phase: creating and implementing a household survey, and expanding on those answers through conducting semi-structured interviews. Ultimately, we conducted a combination of 31 household surveys, representing 221 household members, and 14 semi-structured interviews with individuals in Bachhauli, collecting detailed descriptions of Tharu households' livelihoods and their involvement in the tourism sector, as well as their

perceptions and attitudes towards the growing sector. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative data were integrated to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic impact of the tourism sector on the livelihoods of the Tharu community.



**Figure 2:** Ward #6 - Bachhauli VDC (red borders), Chitwan District, Nepal. Yellow references indicate location of surveys and interviews.

## 4.1. Data Collection and Analysis

### 4.1.1. *Qualitative*

During the initial stage of our research process, we held open, informal conversations with owners of several tour agencies and hotels in Sauraha. Our aim was to gather information regarding trends in tourism, general perceptions of the sector, and representation of Tharu culture. Our preliminary findings during this stage ultimately guided the qualitative and quantitative focus of our research to be on Tharu individuals and households living within Bachhauli.

The main objective of our qualitative process was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how tourism is perceived by Tharu people, how it has impacted their livelihoods and what changes have occurred since the introduction of tourism. The choice of using semi-structured interviews to gain insights into their thought processes was best suited for our research, as: "...if the goal is to understand the way that participants view a phenomenon, then it is important to allow the flow of conversation to reflect those aspects that are salient..." (Dewalt and Dewalt 2011: 123). Therefore, we conducted 14 semi-structured interviews, using informal form and pre-coded written structure of open-ended questions (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2011) (Appendix D). We interviewed eight males and six females Tharus, ranging from around 20 to 70 years old and varying in educational and work backgrounds. Organizing semi-structured interviews allowed us to delve deeper into the thought process behind attitudes and views expressed by participants when discussing the presence of the tourism sector. The benefit of this qualitative method was that we balanced having a framework that covered the topics relevant to answer our research questions, whilst allowing some flexibility for participants to raise issues particularly pertinent to them.

Every semi-structured interview was recorded and later transcribed. Additionally, to allow for anonymity of the participants, a code was assigned to each of them, with I#1 referring to Interview #1 (see table below for the complete list of code). The qualitative data was analysed and coded with the Nvivo software. We followed an open coding in grounded theory model, which is an analytic process in which concepts of the observed data and phenomena are attached during qualitative analysis (Flick, 2018). This procedure aims at developing substantial codes in the analysis of text data to describe, name or classify the phenomenon under consideration (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990 as cited in Flick, 2018). For this purpose, through coding with NVivo, we identified some nodes. We segmented the data into meaningful expression and described them in single words or short sequences of words, where relevant

concepts and information were attached to these expressions. The code can be linked to a line, a sentence or a paragraph. The result is a list of codes attached to the texts (Flick, 2018) (see Appendix C).

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Interview #1	I1	Nature Guide
Interview #2	I2	Hotel Owner
Interview #3	I3	Nature Guide
Interview #4	I4	Nature Guide
Interview #5	I5	Hotel Owner
Interview #6	I6	Housewife. Husband is a Nature Guide.
Interview #7	I7	'Retired' couple. One son owns a shop in Sauraha
Interview #8	I8	Café Owner in Sauraha
Interview #9	I9	Owner Cultural Tourism Attraction in Sauraha
Interview #10	I10	Owner Cultural Tourism Attraction in Sauraha
Interview #11	I11	Employee Tour Office in Sauraha
Interview #12	I12	Owner Tour Office in Sauraha
Interview #13	I13	Basket Weaver
Interview # 14	I14	Basket Weaver

**Figure 3:** *Table of Interviews with their associated code.*

#### **4.1.2. Quantitative**

To record Tharu households' livelihoods and their perceptions and attitudes towards the tourism industry, a household survey was implemented in Bachhauli during the first week of March 2020. The survey consisted of questions about family and work history within tourism, sources of income, ownership of and use of land and livestock, and statements on tourism related to profitability, benefits, and impact (see Appendix E). As Pelz (2020) states, "...surveys are an excellent vehicle for measuring a wide variety of unobservable data, such as people's preferences, [...] attitudes, [...] or factual information" and also constitutes the best way to acquire representative data "...about a population that is too large to observe directly". In our case, as the total population in the area was unknown, we assumed an estimated population of 1,230 Tharu households and 5,780 individuals, an increment of 10% regarding the 1,119 households and 5,256 individuals estimated by the National Census in 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics,

2020), similar to the projections made by the World Bank for the total population of the country (World Bank, 2020). With the aim to facilitate the analysis, the data collected was divided into two levels: households and individuals. Then it was uploaded in Microsoft Excel and processed through STATA. Among the main variables studied were the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their households, sources and amounts of income, tenure of land and animals and attitudes towards tourism. The results of the analysis, presented in bar and pie graphs, are mainly descriptive and work as support for our qualitative data. While some probit models were run in STATA in order to find correlations between different households' characteristics and their attitudes towards tourism, the results were not significant enough to be published.

The sample, compounded by 31 households and 221 individuals, represents 2.52% and 3.82% of the Tharu population respectively. The survey was conducted with only one representative per household, meaning that data about the 221 individuals was collected according to the information provided by the 31 respondents. Participants were Tharu or were intermarried into Tharu households. Among the respondents, 68% were female and 32% were male, with an average age of 38 years. 26.67% of them had never received formal education, and 43% did not complete secondary school. On average, a household is composed of 7.13 individuals, where 50.68% of them were female and 49.32% were male, and about 20.65% were children (17 years or younger).

## **5. Limitations**

Some limitations incurred during the data gathering process for surveys and semi-structured interviews included having incomplete or misinformation of ages, education levels, land sizes, occupations (either current or previous) and income. This was in part due to documentary error by the conductor(s) or issues with the recollection of participants. Additionally, we acknowledge that with the nature of having most information being translated to us from Tharu or Nepalese into English by our research assistant, there is a possibility that additional information may have been missed during interviews due to language barriers. Furthermore, one of the main challenges that we faced was working with outdated census data from 2011, with which we worked to calculate our estimations to implement our household survey. The present administrative borders of Ward 6 within Ratnanagar Municipality do not precisely fit with the former administrative area called Bachhauli Village Development Committee described in the Census 2011, and therefore the total population of the area under study remains unknown.

## **6. Ethical Considerations**

Throughout our research, we strictly adhered to the American Anthropological Association's Statement of Ethics (2012), to ensure that we worked in a transparent, respectful, and professional manner within the field. We consistently asked for clear verbal consent, with a witness present, while we interviewed and talked with participants, while also ensuring they had a precise and clear understanding of the purpose of our research. Furthermore, the anonymity of our participants was ensured within our findings and we informed our participants that they would be able to access our report online, due to the website that had been set up, by the University and our local support team, to share our findings. Additionally, through organizing a community presentation near the end of our research, we were able to invite participants to hear about our research and preliminary findings, allowing for feedback and communication on the data collected.

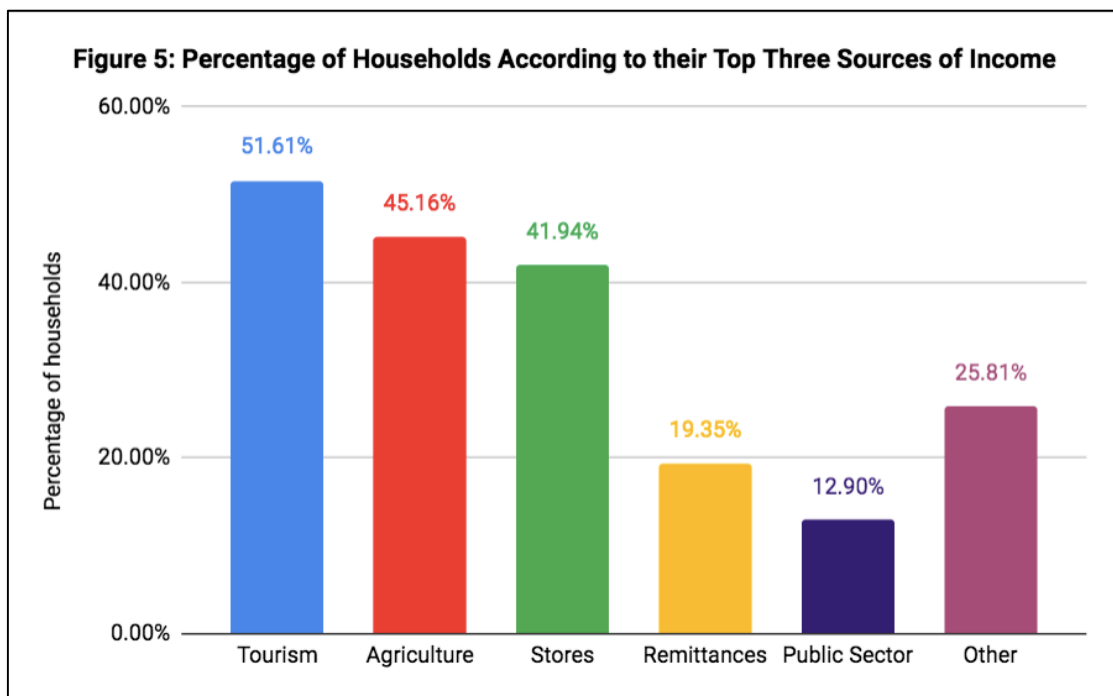
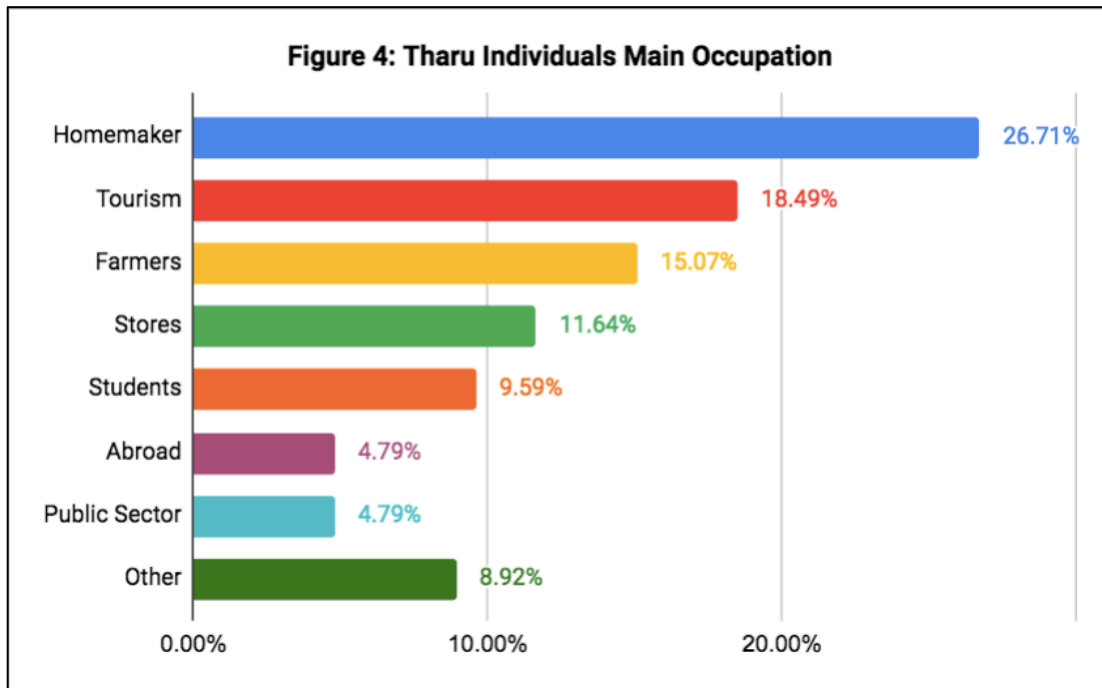
## **7. Results and Analysis**

### **7.1. Tharu households' sources of income in Bachhauli**

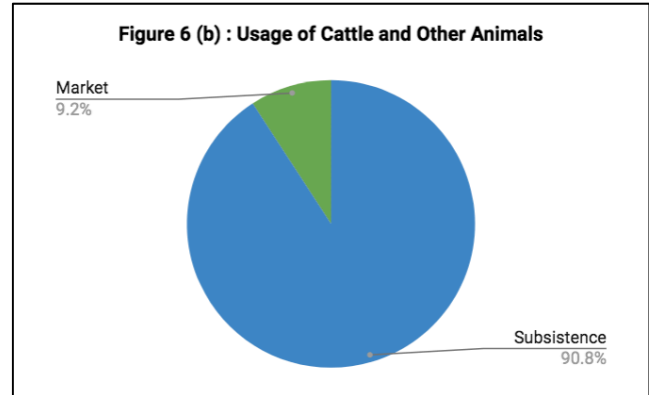
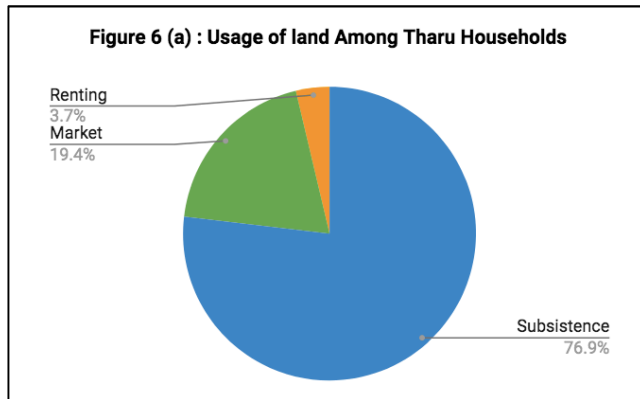
#### **7.1.1. *Tharu Households: Main Sources of Income***

Of the 31 households we surveyed, encompassing 221 individuals, we found that out of 146 adults, 26.71% were stay-at-home spouses, 18.49% worked in tourism related activities, and 15.07% worked as farmers, as a main occupation. Other occupations included: working in stores, abroad, in the public sector, studying, and more (Figure 4). We asked households to list their top three sources of income and they reported that income from tourism related activities was the most common. According to Figure 5, 51.61% of households listed tourism as one of their three main sources of income, while 45.16% sourced income from agricultural activities, and 41.94% worked, or owned, stores. Likewise, our findings show that the monthly average income of a Tharu household in Bachhauli hovers around 41,375 NPR (343.89 USD), while the monthly average income from the tourism industry approaches 9437.5 NPR (78.44 USD). Thus, this activity represents on average more than 22% of the total income of Tharu households in the area. However, beyond the important share it compounds in the local income, none of the households surveyed described tourism as their sole source of income. Indeed, it represents 41,56% of the total average income for households that listed tourism as one of their three sources of income, while tourism represents 54% of the total average income for households that listed having tourism as their main activity. However, despite the expansion of the sector in Chitwan since the establishment of the CNP in 1973, more than 87% of the households surveyed still own agricultural land. Considering Figure 6a and 6b, more than 76% of

the farming land is used for subsistence while less than 20% of the produce is destined for the market. Similarly, 77% of the households own goats, buffalos, ducks, chickens or oxes, but less than 10% is destined for the market. Hence, considering farm land and livestock, most of the households practice agriculture as a form of subsistence.



These numbers show that while tourism is a significant source of income, there is consistent livelihood diversification occurring within Tharu households. This was confirmed throughout our semi-structured interviews, where most of our informants, working in tourism, were still practicing agriculture, or had one or more members of the household working abroad. Throughout this research, the comparison between other forms of livelihoods, such as farming and migration, was heavily used to grasp the importance of tourism amongst the studied population.



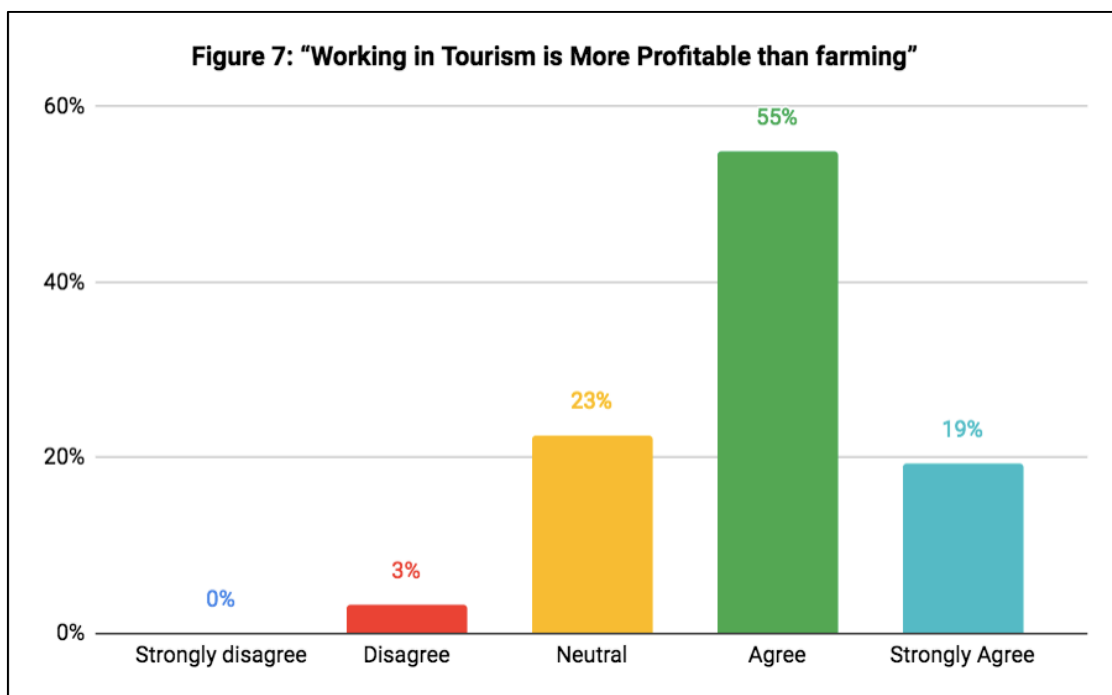
### 7.1.2. *Diversification of Sources of Income: Tourism and Farming*

As outlined by Rahut et al. (2014) and Chambers and Conway (1992), rural households in developing countries tend to diversify their livelihoods to reduce risk and poverty, while enhancing their well-being. This seems to ring true for Tharu households, that justified getting involved in tourism for better income and work conditions. According to our survey, when asked if working in tourism is more profitable than farming, more than 75% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Figure 7). Similarly, I#9 stated that, in the region, tourism was bringing more money than anything else, saying that “...you can deal very nicely, and [...] pay very nice money”. I#1, a nature guide, confirmed that tourism is “...good money, very easy money” while other sectors represent “...very poor money”. I#7 also used the term ‘easy money’, explaining: “...because you don’t have to go to another country or another town”. Yet, the decision to enter the tourism sector is not only made from a desire to increase income.

Tharu households in Bachhauli seem to be attracted to the improved socio-economic conditions that have occurred as a result of employment in the tourism industry. When asked if tourism was a better job than working on a farm, I#4 answered that “...yes it is, better” because “...working on a farm is hard”. Informant #6 added that even if you can earn a decent income from cultivating the land, compared to working in a hotel, there are still “...other benefits working in a hotel. You don’t have to be under the sun

[...] because you are in the shade. It is also about working conditions, because you do not have to work on sunny days” (I#6). A family that recently opened a hotel told us that as farmers, they do not “...get much money from farming. Now, with this business, [they] get a little support from this hotel” (I#2). They explained that tourism is more profitable than farming since it provides direct income faster than farming:

“[Tourism] is better than depending only on agriculture [...] because you have to prepare some vegetables and rice paddy. It is a long process, we have to wait a year. If tourists come here, they pay per night, per day, and we get a little more money from tourism. Because from agriculture you have to wait for a long time” (I#2)

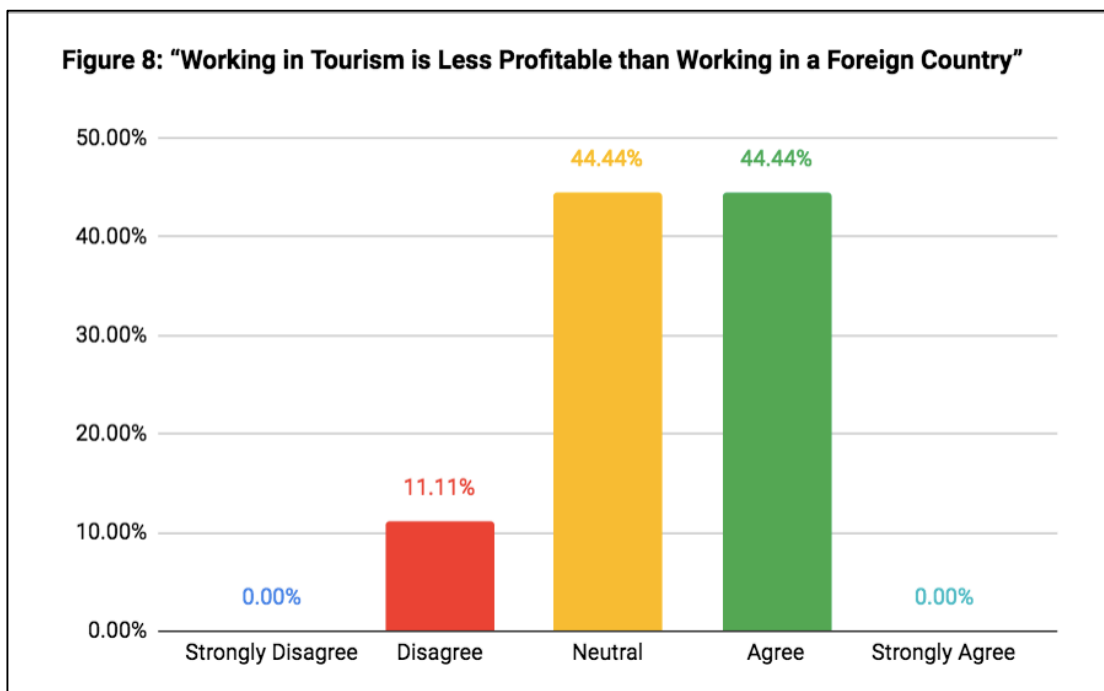


Along with being perceived as more profitable, employment in tourism is seen as a line of work that allows for more freedom and flexibility. As mentioned by I#8, “...tourism is freedom”, while I#4 mentioned that he feels “*tension free*” when he works as a nature guide. Additionally, I#6 told us that working as a nature guide “...was easier than working on a construction site. It is not labor work, you just have to explain to someone”. The same informant told us that her husband got sick while working abroad and decided to return to Sauraha to work as a nature guide. She mentioned that compared to working in a foreign country, “... it’s better to work here, because at least we are here for each other, in good and bad... it’s less money but it’s good here”. This particular story brings up the final point of this section, focusing on migration as a comparative lens to tourism.

### 7.1.3. Diversification of Sources of Income: Tourism and Migration

Other than working in the tourism sector, migration seems to be an important source of livelihoods diversification among Tharu households. Considering Figure 5, almost 20% of the households surveyed listed remittances as one their main sources of income. I#8 mentioned that “...if there was no tourism, I would have been abroad”. Several individuals stated that migration involves higher income than any other type of employment. I#10 informed us that in Sauraha “...there are very very low salaries. This is one reason why most of Tharus, they went abroad, in Gulf countries”. I#6 added that if you want to earn more money “...you go to a foreign country”. Furthermore, more than 40% of the households surveyed agreed that working in a foreign country represents better income than tourism, while 44% of them had a neutral opinion (Figure 8). Yet, not everyone chose to leave, and more chose to stay to get involved in tourism, to be closer to their family, even if the pay is lower:

“...the people who want to earn a lot more money, they go to foreign countries. If they are getting a job here, they are getting a low income, but they are satisfied. Like they don't have to leave their family.” (I#7)



Even if the income from the tourism sector is lower than working in a foreign country, the increase in quality of life the sector brings to households, such as being close to your family, seems to be decisive.

To summarize, the reasons behind the involvement of Tharu households in tourism are in line with fundamental points of the tourism and development literature: that tourism improves livelihoods and socio-economic conditions of a society (Cárdenas-García and Pulido-Fernández, 2019). Main points raised by our informants are that working in the tourism sector is a better source of income than traditional livelihoods or working in a foreign country, while offering better working conditions and more freedom. Yet, even if tourism seems to be an attractive source of income, households continue to operate with a varied livelihoods portfolio. Most households confirmed that tourism was not enough to cover their monthly expenses, due to the seasonality and risks that comes with the industry, as the next section will explain.

## **7.2. The Role of Tourism in Tharu Livelihoods**

### ***7.2.1. Tourism and Tharu Livelihoods: Employment Opportunities***

With tourism-related occupations as the largest employer of adults in Bachhauli, as our survey results indicate, we can conclude that tourism acts as a significant employer in the area for Tharu households (Figure 4). A Tharu cafe owner in Sauraha was adamant about tourism having brought more jobs for the Tharu community: *“Yeah for sure. Because of lot hotels have established in the area, and need lot of staff so lot of people they get opportunities”* (I#8). The perception that the expansion of the tourism sector had resulted in an increase in job opportunities rings true for many of our semi-structured interviews, and transcended lines of age, gender, and occupation. When we asked a Tharu housewife about job opportunities for Tharu people, she responded positively:

*“Yeah, nowadays, people are getting jobs more than last times... Normally, Tharu people, especially women, are getting for laundry service, housekeeping, cooking, and... men, they are getting as touring, as nature guides”* (I#6).

While participants acknowledged a general increase in opportunities, many noted that these increases had occurred in very specific types of jobs. Working as nature guides was often cited as a very popular position, since it is considered an “easier” option for Tharus because of their long-held traditions of having strong connections to the jungle and living amongst animals. As stated by an owner of a Tharu cultural tourist attraction, when asked about widespread employment of Tharus as nature guides:

*“It is very easy you know, because we know the jungle, we know the animals. Easy to travel in the jungle. Because we spend... many times in the jungle... when you small, you go in jungle and the woods with fathers and mothers, and watch which kind of animals in which place...” (I#9).*

Additionally, employment in hotels was cited as another popular option: *“...most of these hotel owner[s], they prefer Tharu people because... they do hard work, they obey as well. They have opportunities as well, but not in higher posts” (Interview #8).*

Numerous participants noted the lack of Tharu representation in managerial and ownership roles in tourism. In fact, there was general consensus about Tharus not tending to own hotels, but being largely employed as hotel staff in non-managerial functions. When a basket weaver was asked what kinds of jobs Tharus tend to hold in tourism, she responded: *“Normally like a nature guide, tour guide, and elephant rider, and waiter, and server... I think only a little bit of Tharu people are getting manager work...” (I#14).* From our interviews, we were able to pinpoint three factors that participants cited as being the main drivers behind influencing the employment opportunities available to the Tharu: location, educational levels, and ethnicity.

### **7.2.2. *Tourism and Tharu Livelihoods: Factors Influencing Opportunities***

Through our analysis, we found that the framework enabled by Rahut et al. (2014) in their study of livelihoods in rural Nepal in determining livelihood diversification outside of agriculture to be applicable to our findings. Rahut et al. (2014) cite educational levels, ethnicity, and location as the three main drivers behind livelihood diversification out of agriculture, and we found that the three factors continued to be brought up during our research.

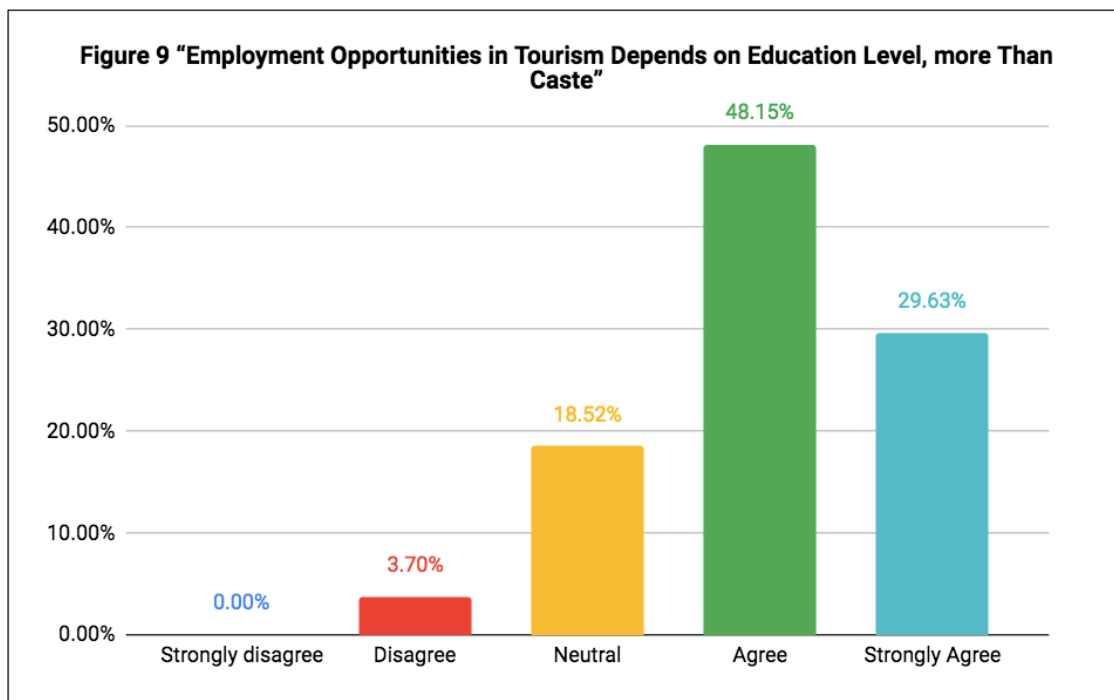
#### **7.2.2.1. Location**

Participants often labeled Bachhauli as a “tourism area” when being asked why they decided to start working in the industry. The wife of a travel and tourism agency owner stated: *“It’s a tourist area and there are not other profitable business besides this so why not open a tour and travel?” (I#12).* Furthermore, I#2 mentioned that Sauraha is *“...the best for tourism... my family member, they all work here [in the tourism sector]”*, while I#9 said he started working in the industry *“...because Sauraha is good for tourism,... that’s the main reason”*. The image of the area as a ‘tourism area’ and perceived physical proximity of the tourism sector has led to Tharu households diversifying their livelihood

strategies to include employment in the tourism sector. This phenomenon supports the argument that households closer to markets have more opportunities to diversify into non-farm activities (Rahut et al. 2014).

### 7.2.2.2. Education

As written by Rahut et al. (2014: 261), “...the lack of education and financial capital is a barrier for a household’s ability to diversify”. In our research, Tharus interviewed often cited education as playing a main role in which positions they could be hired for in the tourism sector. Higher educational attainment was associated with higher positions in tourism: “...education provides you with more good alternatives, more good employment opportunities in the tourism sector” (I#6) and “...if someone is a manager, then they are from their education background” (I#2). This follows the findings outlined by Rahut et al. (2014), that households with higher levels of education were able to more easily diversify into non-farm activities with higher returns, supporting the perception that higher educational levels can result in managerial positions in the tourism sector. This perception was further strengthened by the findings from our survey, where we asked participants to what extent they agreed with the statement: Employment opportunities in tourism depend on education level more than caste (Figure 9).



In total, about 78% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Historically, the Tharu attained lower educational levels than other ethnic groups, due to various factors such as their traditional role as farmers within Nepali society and limited access to educational institutions in Nepal (Rahut et al., 2014). Participants cited long-lasting educational inequalities between the Tharus and other ethnicities as a prominent reason why the Tharu were often not employed in managerial and owner roles in the tourism sector. When asked about why differences between Tharus and other ethnicities exist, one hotel owner stated:

*“It’s because of the education system, not because of the caste. So because of their education level, they [Chhetri and Brahmin] are more education so they know more things so they started their business early. In the older ages, we didn’t know anything about those things...” (I#2).*

A basket weaver noted: *“...They’re [Chhetri and Brahmin] quite more intelligent than Tharu people and yeah, they know the loan system well...” (I#12).* Knowledge of the system, particularly the loan system, was often mentioned as being the biggest barrier to Tharus starting their own businesses, thus resulting in many other castes owning businesses rather than Tharus.

However, this inequality is slowly being decreased, as younger Tharus attain higher educational levels than generations before them. While education was seen as a catalyst for inequality, it was also seen as the solution to solve the very same inequality it had caused. A Tharu nature guide stated: *“Before, Tharu were not educated. Now, younger children are educated and doing better” (I#3).* A hotel owner interviewed echoed this sentiment:

*“Nowadays these... new generation, they have some education and ideas for restaurants and making hotels... So even if they are lending money from banks, they know the interest system. Our grandfather’s generation didn’t know anything about business” (I#2).*

Access to capital, specifically financial capital such as loans, has historically acted as a barrier for the Tharu to begin their own businesses (Guneratne, 2016), but there seems to be general acknowledgement that this is slowly changing due to increased educational levels for the younger generations, leading them to be able to access this capital more easily

### 7.2.2.3. Ethnicity and Caste

While education was named as the most important factor in determining the jobs that Tharus can access, the role the caste system played was acknowledged through the importance of social capital generated through ethnic and caste ties in hiring processes: “...for accountant, managers [higher posts], they [business owners] don't give that post mostly. They prefer their own caste” (I#8), and “...most of the owners of the hotels, they are from other castes... if they are going to put anyone in a manager post, they are their caste” (I#14). Yet there is a perception of decreasing caste discrimination. According to I#6, even if Tharus have less opportunities, “...this kind of discrimination is getting less because people are getting educated”. Thus, education remains the most important factor in deciding the job opportunities that the Tharu have access to in the tourism sector.

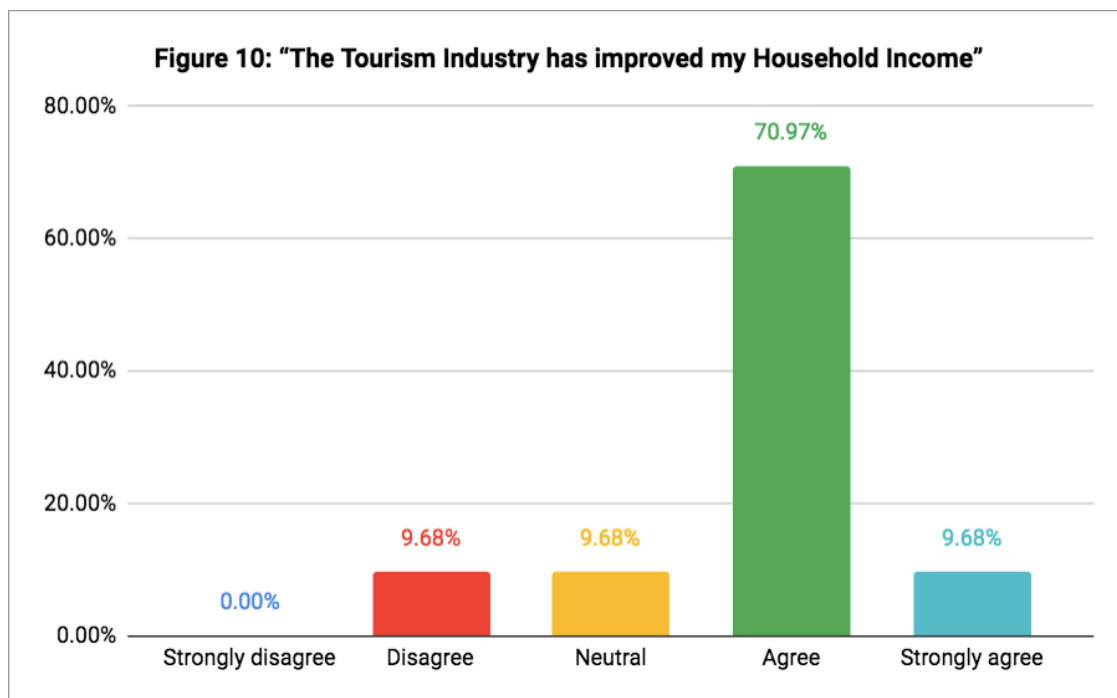
To conclude this section, as outlined by Rahut et al. (2014) and reiterated in our research, access to natural, physical, and social capital assets are key factors that determine livelihood options available to households. The role of capital in the livelihood diversification strategies for Tharu households remains significant; human capital in the form of educational level, and social capital in the form of ethnic and caste ties, are perceived as main determinants of job opportunities. Therefore, as increased access to capital continues with the development of tourism, we can expect to slowly see changes in the positions that Tharus hold in the tourism sector.

### 7.2.3. **Tourism and Tharu Livelihoods: The Impact of Seasonality**

The impact of the concept of ‘seasonality’ remains relevant throughout our analysis. As previously stated, seasonality on its own explains many household livelihood diversifying strategies (Ellis, 1998). The tourism sector remains seasonal and unstable in nature, due to the endowments of the region and the characteristics of its tourism activities. Income generated from the tourism sector depends very much on the time of the year (i.e. high season versus low season) as well as if any unprecedented shocks occur to impact the tourism sector in the region. The impact of the 2016 Nepal earthquake is an example of a shock that affected the national tourism sector, resulting in many households experiencing significant decreases in income as the number of tourists visiting the country plummeted (Kunwar and Limbu, 2015; Ghimire, 2015). The role of seasonality remains prevalent within our findings in Bachhauri.

Several participants stated that the income they earned from the tourism sector is enough to cover their monthly expenses “... depending on the month. Some months it is okay, others it is not enough ...”

(I#6). Even with seasonality playing a role in incomes, participants also noted that during the high season, tourism can generate a significant amount of income: *“If it’s lots of people coming here, for 6 months, it is enough, you can do a lot of money for 6 months. And half 6 month, there will be tourist, obviously, but not so many. So you do overcome”* (I#8). Even with the impact of seasonality on incomes, results from our survey did indicate that generally respondents felt like their household incomes had increased since diversifying into the tourism sector. As seen in Figure 10, when asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘The tourism industry has improved my household income’, almost 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.



While increases in household incomes were noted, respondents still emphasized the instability of working in the tourism sector, especially the instability caused by external shocks, which ultimately determines their incomes. While we were conducting research, during the tourism high season, we were told by locals that there were significantly less tourists than usual. As a result of the global outbreak of COVID-19, that began in January in China, international tourism to Nepal had decreased drastically. A hotel owner pointed out:

*“Now, international tourists are not coming because of the China virus, coronavirus. They are not coming and now it is very difficult for us because we do not have an income”* (I#2).

While tourism can come to dominate the economies of many destinations, its seasonal and unstable nature, resulting in continuous household consumption needs being mismatched with uneven income flows, pushes many households to spread this induced risk by diversifying their livelihood strategies. This rings true for the Tharu inhabitants of Bachhauli. As they experience the detrimental impacts that global shocks have on the tourism industry, such as the outbreak of COVID-19, many are pushed to rely on other livelihoods. In recognition of the seasonality and instability of the sector, Tharu households have consciously decided to engage in a variety of income-generating activities (i.e. livelihood diversification) to combat this risk. As stated by Ellis (1998:12): “When definite outcomes in relation to income streams are replaced by probabilities of occurrence, the social unit diversifies its portfolio of activities in order to anticipate and to mitigate the threat to its welfare of failure in individual activities”. Households are risk-averse, and so we can expect to see a continuation of this behavior as the instability of the tourism sector remains.

To conclude this section, tourism is largely perceived as a sector that provides significant job opportunities to the Tharu. However, these opportunities are largely impacted by educational levels, as well as social capital created by the caste system over time. While tourism does provide job opportunities and perceived increases in income, its seasonal and unstable nature means that Tharu households do not only rely on incomes generated from the sector. We find that households source their incomes from multiple sectors, and that subsistence farming remains a popular and necessary source of sustenance for many households, indicating the use of livelihood diversification as a strategy for spreading risk caused by the unstable nature of the tourism and farming sectors.

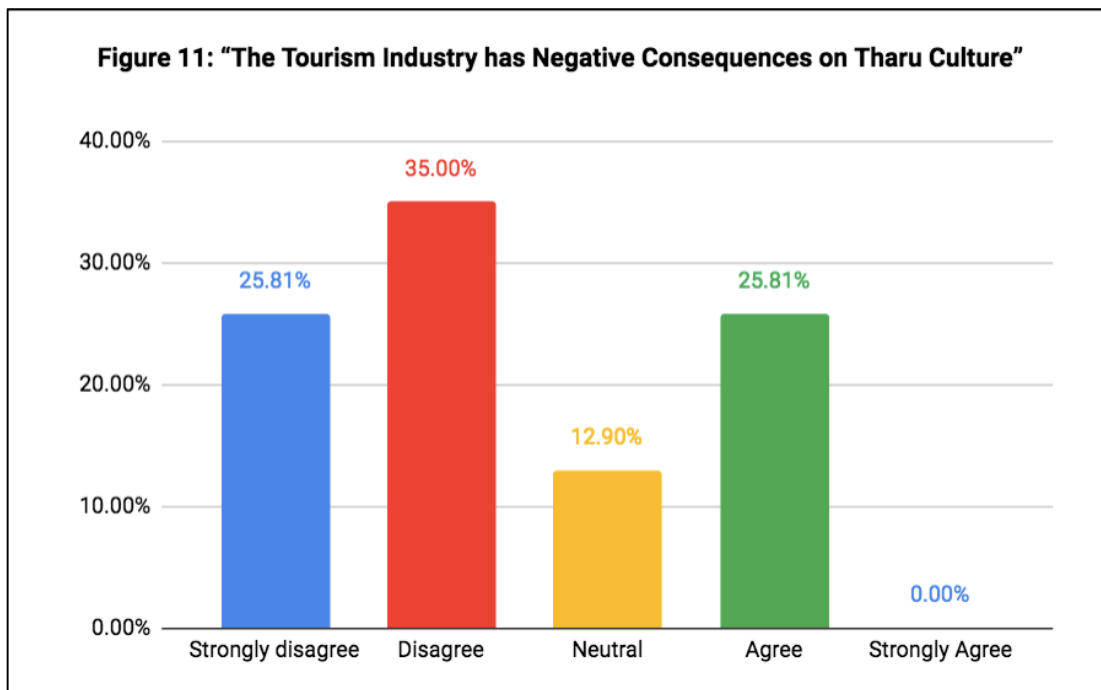
### **7.3. Tharus’ Attitudes Towards Tourism**

#### **7.3.1. *General Attitudes Towards Tourism***

According to our findings, the majority of our informants have a positive attitude towards the growing tourism sector in Chitwan and its socio-economic impact on the Tharus. In terms of economic impact, general attitudes were very positive. Roughly 94% of those surveyed agreed that tourism increased employment opportunities for the Tharu, as noted in Section II. One of our informants stated that “...*tourism is good for every people, because when tourists come here everyone get jobs. They [people] earn money for their livelihood, they get food and they get jobs...*” (I#2). There is a general agreement about tourism creating job opportunities and economic benefits for the Tharus. The sector still represents

one of the best options to make a living without going abroad: “[...] Sometimes we have a lot of money outside country. [...]. We have opportunities here, why not take?” (I#9).

When asked about the impacts of Tharu culture, responses were of a mixed nature. As Figure 11 shows, more than 60% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement: The tourism industry has negative consequences on Tharu culture.



Although tourism is mostly seen as profitable and beneficial for Tharu people, some respondents voiced concerns about Western influences on Tharu culture. Many respondents agreed that “...smoking, and hashing, drinking, and making [nontraditional] tattoos” (I#1) are some of the habits younger Tharus are adopting from foreigners as they “...are mixing this [Tharu] culture with foreign culture” (I#11). Other participants were concerned that the growing influence of Western culture will result in a loss of their culture. As one respondent explained: “Most of the teenagers are trying to copy foreigners, or other cultures... if there are copying foreigners then they are losing their culture” (I#13). Thus, while general attitudes towards tourism remain positive, we do find a growing interest for foreign, and specifically Western, cultures, alongside growing concerns about cultural loss.

### 7.3.2. *“We are also human beings”*: Preserving or Selling Tharu Culture?

As the Tharus tend to be frequently represented in the tourism sector in Chitwan, we wanted to gauge general feelings towards this phenomenon and whether the Tharu community felt that the tourism sector had been beneficial in aiding to preserve Tharu culture. Some respondents replied positively, stating that tourism had helped to revitalize the culture and had led the younger generation to become more interested in learning more about their heritage. As one respondent points out:

*“There’s not such a negative impact because we’re kind of trying to conserve our culture. Yeah just take example, just to show the guests over there coming over, just for only those people, at least we are preserving our culture and yeah if you say economically, it’s far better” (I#12)*

Moreover, the emphasis given to Tharu culture in the tourism sector is often perceived as a way to keep Tharu culture alive while allowing foreigners to learn about it:

*“It’s kind of like I don’t think they are selling our culture, it’s kind of like showing [...] Tharu culture. [...] Yeah so that they [tourists] can come over here and learn something about Tharu culture” (I#11).*

Along with the occurrence of cultural preservation, some respondents were skeptical of tourism having positive impacts on Tharu culture promotion and preservation. They voiced concerns about the true purpose behind cultural events, citing them to only be for profit-generation. The research of Poudel (2014) on the development of the tourism sector in Chitwan implies that Tharu performances are becoming a mere tool to make money. He argues that, in the past, different types of dances were performed in special occasions and festivals but nowadays performers are paid and this “reveals that Tharu dances have totally become commercialized” (53). However, respondents shared with us that even if these activities were intended for tourists: *“Tharu museum and Tharu dance center, [...] are preserving [the Tharu] culture” (I#14)*. Furthermore, some respondents did express concerns over non-Tharu individuals working in the tourism sector, stating they engage in *“...showing us [The Tharu] like a tool to attract people” (I#7)*. Another participant further noted: *“It means that most of migrant people, they run very good hotel around here, and they stole our culture, they sell our culture” (I#10)*. These comments were made towards non-Tharu hotel and homestay owners who advertise their businesses as ‘Tharu’. Indeed, when tourists see hotels labeled as ‘Tharu’, they are led to believe that the accommodation is Tharu-owned and directly benefits the Tharu community, but that is not always the case. One informant explained that the inauthentic

utilization of Tharu culture within the tourism sector results in uneven economic benefits between the Tharu and other ethnic groups:

*“Because some tourists, they like indigenous people, Tharu people, they want to support marginalized communities, or if you put their name they will support us. This is one reason. [...] Some hotels say this is Tharu land, some are run by Tharu owners and it is ok, but even Brahmin put our name. So this is very very bad for us” (I#10).*

Opinions on whether or not the tourism sector benefits Tharu culture is a disputed topic and is still being discussed within the wider Tharu community. We can conclude from our findings that Tharus’ attitude towards tourism is generally positive since Tharu perceive the sector as playing a role in preserving their culture, as well as recognizing the economic benefits tourism produces.

### **7.3.3. Local Development and Social Changes**

Poudel (2014) explains that before the introduction of tourism in Chitwan Tharu houses, and most hotels and resorts, were built in traditional style by using materials such as cow dung, strew, soil and bamboo. These changes were related to “...the natives became attracted towards the modern style of construction” (Poudel, 2014: 50). He argues that international tourism brought a western and ‘modern’ aesthetic that the Tharu are gradually adopting while discarding their traditional lifestyle (Poudel, 2014). Our data partially confirmed this view. Indeed, it seems that more concrete houses and hotels are being built, as well with better roads and facilities. One of our informants, I#6, had many insights on recent structural developments in the area:

*“Since her [our informant’s] childhood, she’s been here, and there are some changes. Like lots of houses nowadays they are making into concrete houses... It’s quite nice to have the tourism sector here, [...] like lots of road construction is going and the area is getting promoted more and more and they are getting more facilities from the government. Is good for development”. (I#6)*

Even if these changes seem to be appreciated, there are still mixed concerns regarding how they impact Tharus. Indeed, I#5 thinks this “...is bad for Tharu culture... because even if you visit a Tharu village, you will not see typical houses. Everything is concrete now. Even for local people”. Along with an evolution in people's tastes, government regulations have also impacted building practices in Bachhauli. The establishment of the CNP through the passing of the National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1973, resulted

in the relocation of the Tharu, thus limiting their access to the park (Lipton and Bhattari, 2014). Therefore, it became hard for the Tharu to collect wood, elephant grass and other materials traditionally used to build their houses. This further explains why traditional buildings are increasingly being substituted by concrete ones.

Our findings indicate that the Tharu community holds a generally positive perception of the tourism sector, noting especially its economic benefits and potential for cultural preservation. Finally, tourism is perceived as fostering local development, yet concerns about the loss of traditional lifestyles are shared among our informants.

## **8. Conclusion**

Throughout our research on the role of tourism on Tharu livelihood strategies in Bachhauli, we focused on exploring three questions: (1) Where do Tharu households source their income from? (2) What role does tourism play in the livelihoods of Tharu households? (3) What are Tharu attitudes towards tourism? Our findings indicate that a significant number of households have diversified into the tourism sector, but maintain diverse livelihood portfolios, often engaging in subsistence farming, shopkeeping, and other activities. This diversification is seen as a risk-spreading strategy, where households are able to spread the risk caused by seasonal sectors, such as agriculture and tourism, by adopting multiple livelihoods. This is applicable to our research, where tourism does act as a significant source of income for Tharu households, yet it is not the sole source. Furthermore, Tharus generally held positive attitudes towards the tourism sector in terms of its ability to aid in cultural preservation, by promoting and hosting Tharu cultural events, but tended to be skeptical towards the purposes of these activities, stating that often it was just for profit-generation. There was also a general acknowledgement of the mixing of cultures that was occurring due to international tourism, seen in the increasing influence of Western cultures on local Tharu customs, especially within the younger generation.

With our findings from our case study of Bachhauli, we aim to further the conversation surrounding the overlap of tourism as a development tool and livelihood diversification strategies. As the tourism industry continues to grow across the globe, the impact that it has on determining, and changing, livelihoods cannot be overlooked. We hope that moving forward, more research will be conducted on the role of tourism on livelihood diversification strategies in developing countries, as well as the sector's ability to bring about significant socio-cultural changes for indigenous populations.

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## APPENDIX A - PERSONAL OBSERVATION (FIELD NOTES)

### **Field Note 1: February 25th. 10:32. Exploratory Interview with Tharu Researcher**

"...99% of hotel workers tend to be Tharu. Tharu also often work as guides, but tend to have issues with worker rights and access to social security funds. Large representation of Tharu in the sector leads to a lot of money being kept in Sauraha. Money is earned and spent in area. Profit from the park is reinvested in the community, but money spent by tourists also helps the area. Money spent on hotels, restaurants, and stores help locals. Good for business."

## APPENDIX B - WORK DIVISION GROUP 1.1.

- 1. Introduction (CHEE)**
- 2. Historical Background (CHEE & HUGO)**
  1. Agrarian history of Nepal and Chitwan National Park
  2. Political and Economic Changes Affecting the Tharus
  3. Tourism Development in Chitwan
- 3. Literature Review and Analytical Framework (SANDRA & LÉONIE)**
  1. Tourism as a tool for Development
  2. Livelihood Diversification Strategies
- 4. Field Site and Methodology (CHEE, HUGO & LÉONIE)**
  1. Data Collection and Analysis
    1. Qualitative
    2. Quantitative
- 5. Limitations (FEDERICA & CHEE)**
- 6. Ethical Considerations (FEDERICA, CHEE, SANDRA)**
- 7. Analysis and Results**
  1. Tharu Households' Sources of Income in Bachhauli (HUGO & LÉONIE)
  2. The Role of Tourism in Tharu Livelihoods (SANDRA & HUGO)
  3. Tharu's Attitudes Towards Tourism (FEDERICA)
- 8. Conclusion (SANDRA)**

**APPENDIX C - NVivo**

Through coding with Nvivo, we identified some nodes. We segmented the data into meaningful expressions and described them in single words or short sequences of words, where relevant concepts and information were attached to these expressions. The code can be linked to a line, a sentence or a paragraph. The result is a list of codes attached to the texts, complemented with observations that are relevant to the research question. In other words, under the node in Nvivo '> Tourism >> Tharu Opportunities >>> Education' the expression *"If someone is a manager then they are from their education background"* (I#2) is attached.

The following two figures represent:

1. The coding created in Nvivo with all the different nodes and sub-nodes.
2. A visual 'word frequency cloud' showing the most common words said during our semi structure interviews.

▶ Attitude Towards Tourism	2	3
▶ Impact of Tourism on Tha...	2	2
▼ Livelihoods	0	0
As a Diversification Str...	7	27
As an Adaptation	1	2
▼ Type of Livelihoods	0	0
Farming	5	6
Migration	3	10
Other	2	6
Shop Keeper	1	1
▼ Tourism	7	14
Cultural Tourism	4	5
Hope for Change	3	3
Incentives to Work in T...	5	11
Profitability of Tourism	7	23
Shocks And Struggles	7	25
▼ Tharu Opportunities	8	23
Education	8	24
▼ Marginalization	1	1
Caste	4	13
Government	1	3
Land	3	7
Tourism vs Farming	7	11
Working Conditions	4	16



**APPENDIX D - SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTION LIST****I) Background**

What is your name?

Are you Tharu?

Where do you live?

How old are you?

Gender ( M / F )

Level of education

**II) Household Income**

Who do you live with?

Sources of income (breakdown of sources of income)?

- Ask about any farming land or livestock.
- Any other sources of income.

Any person in the household working in the tourism sector?

- Mention the position(s) in which they are working in;
- Income solely from tourism per month.
- How did they come to work in the tourism sector? Any family members or friends help them get the job?
- Why did you choose to work in the tourism sector?
- Is your source of income from tourism enough to cover your monthly expenses?

**II) Questions Related to Attitude Questions from the Survey****1. “More years of education results in more opportunities for employment in the tourism sector”**

Do you think think Tharu people have the same opportunities as other castes | ethnic groups to work in the tourism sector?

**2. “Tourism has brought an increase in job opportunities for Tharu people”**

Do you think tourism has brought an increase in job opportunities for Tharu people?

What kind of jobs do you think these are?

Why do you think Tharu people have these types of positions?

**3. “The tourism industry has improved my household income”**

Has tourism improved your household income?

Do you see yourself continuing to work in the tourism industry in the future (if not, where)?

**4. “Working in tourism has been more profitable for my household than farming”**

Do you think tourism is more profitable than farming?

How has your life changed since you have been working in the tourism sector?

**5. “The tourism industry has negative consequences on Tharu culture”**

Do you think Tharu culture is being used as a tool in the tourism industry?

Do you think that Tharu culture is being preserved through the cultural tours (dances, museum, handicrafts & etc.) in the tourism sector?

**APPENDIX E - HOUSEHOLD SURVEY**

1. Address (village): \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Household Information** (\* for those that have not lived permanently in your house over the last year)

*	Relation	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Main occupation	Side Job	Years	Education Level
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas
								Grade _____ (1-12) Tech Bach Mas

3. **Comments on household employment history in tourism**

4. **Household Ownership of Land (inside and outside the village)**

		Estimated Total Area
Does your household own agricultural land?	Y / N	
Is your household sharecropping any agricultural land?	Y / N	

1 dhur = 0.8 m2  
 - 20 dhur = 1 Katha  
 1 Katha = 17m2 - 20 katha = 1 bigha  
 1 bigha = 340m2

**5. Usage of Agricultural Land**

Subsistence _____ %	Market _____ %	Renting _____ %	Other: _____
------------------------	-------------------	--------------------	-----------------

6. Are you working on someone else's land for money, how often? monthly / weekly / daily / never

7. Does your household own any livestock? If so, how much

Cows	Buffalo	Ox	Horses	Mules
Goats or sheep	Ducks	Pigeons	Chickens	Other:

8. Do you sell any of your livestock or livestock products on the market?

Subsistence _____ %	Market _____ %
------------------------	-------------------

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree (scale from 1 to 5) with the statements below:

A. "Employment opportunities in tourism depends on education level, more than caste"

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

B. "Tourism has brought an increase in job opportunities for Tharu people"

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

C. "The tourism industry has improved my household income"

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**D. "Working in tourism is more profitable than farming"**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**E. "Working in tourism is less profitable than working in a foreign country"**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**F. "The tourism industry has negative consequences on Tharu culture"**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**G. "My household income is enough to cover monthly expenses for my entire household"**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**10. What are the three main sources of income in your household over the last year (prioritize)?**

1.	2.	3.
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**11. What is your household income per month?**

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**12. What is your tourism household income per month?**

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