

**Appendix 3: A letter ordering Devi Gautam to pay Rs. 3,000 to the Hokshe-Piple Community Forest in compensation for his crime**

Hokshe-Piple Community Forest User Group  
Wana-9, Hokshe  
Shankhuwasabha, Koshi zone, Nepal

Letter No: 056/057

Date: 2056/6/6 (23/07/99)

Subject: Payment

Regarding the subject, Mr. Durga Prasad Gautam has paid Rs 3000/- to the user group community today, which was determined by the assembly of the users due to his illegal extraction of the forest during his vice-presidency. The present chairman of the user group committee, Mr. Jagat Bahadur Karki, received the amount of compensation and given the receipt.

Payee  
Mr. Durga Prasad Gautam

Receiver  
Mr. Jagat Bahadur Karki

Source: Jagat Bahadur Karki

**CHANGING LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF THE DALITS: A CASE STUDY IN THE POKHARA VALLEY**

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**Introduction**

This paper analyzes the changes in the economic relationships between Dalit artisans and the high-caste peasants in a village of western Nepal. The process of urbanization and its consequences for the distribution of natural resources are explored to show how the lives of socially and economically underprivileged artisans have been affected by the recent changes collectively described as development. This paper will also describe the new and challenging paths Dalits have chosen to pursue after the near-disappearance of the traditional forms of inter-dependence between them and the high-caste peasants. However, the paper mainly aims at analyzing the ways in which economic and environmental changes, appreciated by many in the name of development, often have negative consequences for those who have limited access to many kinds of natural resources.

This paper is based on a field study among Dalits (traditional artisans) who inhabit a village called Pachbhaiya lying in the Lekhnath Municipality of Kaski district (see Pokharel 2000).<sup>1</sup> The study covered 45 households of Dalits distributed in four different hamlets (see Table 1). Quantitative information was collected through household surveys in areas such as occupations, landownership, level of educational attainment, etc. Besides, the local people's life histories, stories, jokes, proverbs and songs were also collected as clues to analyze their social and cultural worlds. Structured and unstructured interviews and focused group discussions were held for this purpose. We also participated in different socio-cultural rituals and festivities (for example marriage ceremonies, work parties, funeral ceremonies, etc.). This enabled us to understand the ways in which social relations were expressed and communicated through actions, statements and gestures.

**Table 1: Distribution of Dalit Households in Pachbhaiya by Hamlets, 2000**

Name of Village	Number of Households				Percentage of the Total
	Damai	Kami	Sarki	Total	
Simal Danda	0	6	13	19	42.22
Khudiko Muhan	5	6	0	11	24.44
Deurali	4	5	0	9	20.00
Bhutbhute Kuna	2	4	0	6	13.33
Total	11	21	13	45	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2000

### The Dalits of Pachbhaiya

The three Dalit castes namely, *Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki* stand out as one of the numerically predominant populations of Pachbhaiya *Gaun* (the Nepali term for village). According to the 2001 national census, one fourth of the total population of the Pachbhaiya Gaun consists of Dalits, which is considerably high compared with the national average population of the three Dalit castes. According to the conventional caste hierarchy, these three castes are placed under the category of 'untouchables' (see Höfer 2004). As a result, the Dalits have had limited social and ritual relationships with other high-caste and ethnic groups of the area. However, they have been involved in traditional system of exchange of goods and services with all other local villagers (to be discussed below).

*Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki* were positioned in the lowest stratum of the traditional caste hierarchy, and are still considered impure and untouchable by many traditional minded people in this part of Nepal. Traditionally, they were not allowed to enter temples. The so-called high-caste people in the study area expected the members of Dalit castes to be loyal and polite to them through their language and etiquettes. In Pachbhaiya, Dalits used to request their high caste fellow villagers to judge over the conflicts within their families. Elderly Dalits usually give high level of respect to and show fear from the high-caste villagers than the youths in general.

*Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki* have traditionally played significant roles in the rural agriculture all over Nepal by providing different crafts services as well as agricultural labour. However, the traditional occupations of these Dalits are gradually disappearing from many Nepali villages. Today, very few Dalits depend for their livelihood on their traditional crafts skills such as metalworking, cobbling, tanning, tailoring and music playing. The traditional artisans today look down upon their traditional occupations, and view them as unsustainable and 'outdated'. These traditional livelihood strategies have, over the years, been replaced by the 'modern' ones. This process seems to have great consequences for both their current social and economic status and their relationships with other castes and ethnic groups.

### Village Economy

Agriculture is the most important source of livelihood for the people of Pachbhaiya. The land in this area is fertile, and has access to irrigation. Paddy and wheat are the staple crops grown by the villagers. The other crops grown in this area include maize, millet, buckwheat, potato, pulses, beans and various types of vegetables. Tangerines and guavas are the common fruits grown by the villagers mainly for household consumption.

The local people in Pachbhaiya revealed that most portions of grains, vegetables and fruits were not exchanged for money until few years ago. Agricultural products were sold only when the farmers were in an urgent

need of cash, or when the products were in surplus (i.e., having amounts larger than needed for the household consumption). Generally, surplus cereals like paddy, maize, millet, and pulses are sold to the local grain merchants while fruits and vegetables are directly sold to the consumers at the local market near the bus station.

During the leisure time, the villagers wove *doko* (bamboo baskets) and *namlo* (head straps and ropes used to carry loads including bamboo baskets) which were sold locally. Women wove *gundri* (hay-mattress) when they were not busy with farm works, especially during the winter months.

The people of Pachbhaiya purchase goods of their daily needs (such as salt, sugar, vegetable oil, tobacco, etc.) from *Khudiko muhan*, a small market around the village bus station. However, expensive and important items such as a radio, television, clothes, jewelry, etc., were purchased from shops in Pokhara (during big festivals like Dashain and Tihar), which is about 13 km away from the village under study.

### The Dalits and their Occupations in Pachbhaiya

Pachbhaiya is inhabited by Brahmins, Chhetris, Magars, Gurungs, Rais and Dalit castes (i.e. *Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki*). Although we do not present data to depict the livelihood strategies of the other castes except the artisans in this paper, it was evident from the field survey that most of the local Brahmins and Chhetris were agriculturalists who were engaged in subsistence farming on their own lands.<sup>2</sup> Only a handful of Brahmins provided priestly services in addition to agriculture. However, many of the Brahmins and Chhetris were employed in government services as teachers and government officials. The Magars, Gurungs and Rais are the ethnic groups of the Pachbhaiya village who also owned land and practiced agriculture. During our field study only one member of a Gurung household was employed in the British Army as a Gurkha Soldier.

According to the traditional allocation of caste based occupations, the *Damai* stitch and repair clothes, and play the traditional *pancai baja* (traditional musical instruments) during important festivals and ceremonies including marriages and some religious rituals (see Tingey 1994). The *Kami* are the blacksmiths, who mainly manufacture and repair pots and pans and other household implements made out of iron, copper and brass. They also make and repair farm implements like spades, plough blades, sickles, etc. The *Sarki* manufacture and repair leather items such as *halludo* (a leather strap used in making a plough), traditional musical instruments, shoes, etc. None of these skills were obtained from formal schooling and/or training, but were learnt from parents through apprenticeship.

However, there are very few Dalits in Pachbhaiya today who still pursue these traditional occupations. Members of all three Dalit castes work as wage labourers during the cultivation and harvesting of major crops such as paddy

and wheat. Survey data revealed that Dalits in Pachbhैया were involved in different types of income earning activities (see Table 2). Farm and off-farm wage labouring, as Table 2 shows, was the principal source of livelihood for most of Dalits. More than 22 per cent of men and women were found to be earning a living by means of wage labouring.

**Table 2: Distribution of Dalits in Pachbhैया by Economic Activities and Sex**

Economic Activities	Sex				Total	Percent
	Female	Percent	Male	Percent		
Wage Labour (Farm, Off-farm Locally)	36	15.25	18	7.62	54	22.88
Wage Labouring (Gulf Region)	-	0	13	5.5	13	5.50
Wage Labouring (India)	-	0	5	2.11	5	2.11
Traditional Occupations	10	4.23	9	3.81	19	8.05
Agriculture	12	5.08	5	2.11	17	7.20
Fishing	-	0	7	2.96	7	2.96
Business	2	0.84	3	1.27	5	2.11
Office Job (Public and Private organizations)	-	0	5	2.11	5	2.11
None*	52	22.03	59	25	111	47.03
Total	112	109	124	38	236	100

Source: Field Survey, 2000. \*This category includes children and elderly (i.e. the economically dependent population)

Only a few Dalit households of Pachbhैया own agricultural land. Field surveys revealed that only seven households out of 45 owned considerable amounts of agricultural land where they could grow paddy and wheat. Table 3 shows that the ownership of agricultural land is less among the Pachbhैया Dalits. Only 13 households out of 45 own land enough to make kitchen garden. Table 3 also suggests that the Dalits of Pachbhैया cannot produce grains sufficient for their subsistence.

**Table 3: Landownership among the Dalit Households of Pachbhैया**

Land in Ropani <sup>2</sup>	Khet <sup>3</sup>				Bari <sup>4</sup>			
	Damai	Kami	Sarki	Total (%)	Damai	Kami	Sarki	Total (%)
0	10	17	10	37 (82.2)	5	7	-	12 (26.7)
Up to 1	1	1	-	2 (4.4)	3	1	-	4 (8.9)
1.1-2	-	1	-	1 (2.2)	-	4	1	5 (11.1)
2.1-3	-	-	2	2 (4.4)	-	3	7	10 (22.2)

3.1-4	-	1	-	1 (2.2)	2	1	1	4 (8.9)
4.1-5	-	1	-	1 (2.2)	1	2	-	3 (6.7)
5+	-	-	1	1 (2.2)	-	3	4	7 (15.5)
Total	11	21	13	45 (100.0)	11	21	13	45 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey 2000

In addition to the craft services and occasional wage labouring, the artisans also work for the local agriculturalists as plowmen. They are employed by the landlords for about three months a year for the purpose of plowing, leveling and irrigating the land. This form of employment is locally known as *bali ko kaam* (*bali* = food crop; *kaam* = work) and the earning from this is called *majuri* by the local villagers.

During the field study, a few Sarki men reported that they had also started fishing in the Rupa Lake occasionally in order to earn extra income. The catches were sold in the local market. They described this kind of work as a 'fruitless' work. Given the number of Dalit individuals involved in fishing and the incomes they could draw from this occupations, it is clear that fishing is not yet considered as one of the viable occupations by Dalits in Pachbhैया.

One important factor which deprived the local artisans from being employed in government services and other forms of employment was the low level of their educational attainment. Unlike Brahmins and Chhetris, most Dalits in Pachbhैया were illiterate. Field survey revealed that only one Sarki youth had completed his Bachelor's Degree. Although the number of school going children had increased over the years, there were only five Dalit boys in the village who had passed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations. The headmaster of the local secondary school confided that most of the children of the Dalit castes leave school after the fifth or sixth grades.

### Economic Relationships Between Farmers and Dalits

The rural agricultural economy of Pachbhैया provided subsistence to both farming and Dalit households through the traditional systems of exchanges locally known as *bali* and *majuri*. Under these systems the local people exchanged grain, commodities, crafts services and agricultural labour within the village. In the following, we describe these two forms of exchange in brief which were still in practice among some of the local households of both farmers and Dalits at the time of our fieldwork.

**Bali:** The term *bali* literally means cereal crop. It also refers to annual wages paid in kind by farming households to people they employ (Dalits or other castes depending on the nature of service needed and the speciality of the service providing castes in question) during an agricultural year to perform various kinds of tasks including ploughing, making and repair of farm

implements, sewing and mending of clothes/garments, etc. Under the *bali* system in Pachbhaiya, Dalits are paid an annual wage in kind at the time of the harvest of major crops. The amount paid varies by type and extent of services provided or received. The rate for different types of services is fixed by custom varying sometimes according to place and occupation (see Seddon et. al., 1980 for details). However, every farming household paid small shares from their annual grain production (called *bali*) to Dalits who provide their caste-based services irrespective of annual variations of demand of such services.

The local Damai provided tailoring services to all other castes and received *bali* from their clients. When someone in the village needed to repair his/her clothes, she/he went to her/his household's tailor on contract and obtained the service without paying cash. For such annual services given to the clients, the tailor households received a certain portion of grain (generally paddy) annually from every household of her/his clientele. The amount of grain would vary depending on the number of individuals in the client's household. At the time of harvesting the paddy, which generally falls in the month of Mangsir (October-November), members of Dalit households visited the *khalo* (the place where paddy was thrashed) of her/his clients in order to collect their share of the grain. Generally a Damai household received four to five *pathis* (about 12.5 kg) of paddy from every household annually in return for their tailoring services. In the study area a few tailors were working under such agreements. The number of their clients ranged from five to twenty households.

The *bali* agreement did not oblige a tailor to stitch new clothes. When a tailor was asked by his client to stitch a new pair of clothes, she/he had to pay additional money or grain for the service (see Table 4), and pay for necessary materials such as thread, buttons, elastic, zippers, etc.

**Table 4: Wages Received by Damai for Tailoring Services**

Types of Clothes	Unit	Estimated work time (in hours)	Wages (in Rupees)
<i>Daura Suruwal</i> (traditional Nepali dress for men)	1 pair	6	400
Coat/Jacket	1 piece	14	500
Pant/Trousers	1 piece	2	120
Shirt	1 piece	1.5	70
<i>Chaubandi Choli</i> (winter blouse worn by women)	1 piece	2	110
Blouse	1 piece	1.5	60

Source: Field Survey 2000.

The *bali* exchange applied in the case of metalworking, too. Like Damai, the Kami (blacksmiths) provided maintenance services—most important of which is the sharpening of agricultural implements and kitchen utensils—to

their client households. A blacksmith received about five *pathis* (about 12 kg.) of paddy annually from each of her/his clients. Each of Pachbhaiya blacksmiths usually had many clients. One of such craftsman of the study area had a clientele of about thirty-five households. The amount of grain depended on the size of the client's land and on the number of individuals in that family. The blacksmith, like the tailor, received his *bali* at the time of harvesting.

The Sarki of Pachbhaiya manufacture *nara*, a strap of tanned leather which is used in joining the *haris* and *juwa* (yoke) of a plough together. The *nara* is an essential device for the making of a plough. A farmer needs several of them every year, as the traditional plough is the only instrument available for traction.

For the regular supply of *nara*, the Sarki (cobblers/tanners) too received a certain portion of grain from their landowning clients or farmers annually. A Sarki provided his clients with the necessary number of *naras* (which ranged from ten to twelve) for the whole year to each of his client household (the number ranging from ten to thirty), and received approximately four *pathis* (about 10 kg) of paddy from each of such households. They too collected their share of the paddy at the time of harvesting.

The relationship established by the *bali* exchange also expanded to the ritual sphere. A Damai working on *bali*, for instance, would have a claim to a certain portion of meat of the *khasi* (castrated male goat) slaughtered by his clients during the *Dashain* festival. Similarly a client household generally provides his blacksmith and *katuwal* (village emissary who is often a Damai) with some portions of meat. Similarly, when the local people (other than Brahmins and Chhetris) slaughtered a buffalo for meat, the Sarki received its hide.

**Majuri:** The term *majuri* refers to the traditional system of agreement between a landlord and a labourer in which a man (who in most cases belonged to one of the Dalit castes) would work as the landlord's ploughman. This employment was open for the local young men during the cultivation of paddy which usually lasted for about three months. The ploughman received wages in kind for his services, and the quantity of grain was often fixed by custom. A man who worked for the landowning peasant on this condition was called *hali* (literally, ploughman). Besides ploughing the *khet* and *bari* (irrigated and dry fields) for his landlord, the *hali* was also responsible for levelling and irrigating the paddy fields.

A *hali* received food and some used clothes (called *jadauri*) from his landlord during the course of his employment. He usually worked for about three months during the cultivation period and claimed about 30 to 40 *pathi* (about 75 to 100 kg) of paddy from the client at the time of harvesting. There

were ten members of the Dalit castes who worked as *hali* in the study area at the time of our fieldwork.

### Recent Changes in Pachbhaiya and their Consequences for Dalits

When we began our study of Dalits in Pachbhaiya in December 2000, we intended to study and analyze their traditional livelihood strategies. In undertaking the study, we visited several Dalit households and tried to understand the economic, social and political dimensions of the traditional occupations pursued by such people. We visited the furnaces of the local Kami, talked with the Damai in their tailoring shops, carefully took notes of the myths and meanings associated with the traditional musical instruments of the Damai, and observed the process of making *naras* by the Sarki. We also tried to understand the traditional system of exchange between the Dalits and others in the village. The information obtained by means of field observation and interviews, we believe, were quite interesting and significant for the examination of how traditional skills were used by the landless Dalits to fulfil their necessities in a predominantly agrarian village economy.

Within a few days of our field study, we began to realize that the traditional occupations were gradually losing their strength, and were disappearing from the local practices. The local Dalits were not only dissatisfied with their traditional occupations but they were also actually abandoning them. Our conversations with some young Dalits revealed that they viewed their occupations and skills as 'outdated' and incompatible with the new situation. Soon it became apparent that the abandonment of traditional occupations and disappearance of traditional systems of exchanges were producing new consequences for Dalit households in Pachbhaiya. This prompted us to shift the focus of our study to look at the causes and consequences of the changes in the area for the livelihood strategies of Dalit households. In the following, based on our own observation and the narration of the local people, we present some of the major changes in the economic and environmental spheres of Pachbhaiya.

**Economic Changes:** The development of infrastructure and the growth of tourism industry in the past 2-3 decades have given rise to unprecedented economic changes in Pachbhaiya. These changes, which are discussed below, have had great consequences for the subsistence agriculture of the local farmers, traditional occupations of the artisans, and the economic and social relationships between the artisans and the farmers.

The newly constructed motorable road from Pachbhaiya to the Pokhara bazaar has brought about important changes in economic life of Pachbhaiya villagers. It has facilitated the access of the villagers to the industrial goods which are available in Pokhara bazaar. In addition to this, different industrial commodities such as clothes, watches, cigarettes, beverages (mainly Coke,

Pepsi, alcohol, and beer), spices and many more items of regular use have become the stock-in-trade of the village shops after the construction of the road.

The locals reported that electricity reached Pachbhaiya in 1994. By 1996 most of the households had had their houses wired. This gradually gave rise to the purchase and use of different electronic appliances (for example televisions, fans, cassette players, etc.) by the villagers. During our fieldwork, we could observe a growing market of electric bulbs, tube lights, fans, water pumps, etc.

Starting in the late 1980s, the Begnas and Rupa lakes, which lie on the north and south of the Pachbhaiya village, have been developed as tourist spots. This has given rise to the tourism industry in the area. Over the last five to ten years, a significant number of hotels, guest houses and restaurants were established taking into consideration increasing flow of tourists who visit the Begnas and Rupa lakes. A number of village people have been involved in the tourism industry by opening small guest houses, restaurants and other facilities for the tourists. The most significant example of the growth of tourism industry in the Pachbhaiya is the opening of a big resort at *Sundare Danda*—the Begnas Lake Resort. The resort attracts a huge number of tourists and also provides the local people with some employment opportunities. During the time of our fieldwork, more than twenty local villagers worked in this resort. Having said this, it should be pointed out that the Dalits themselves are not among the direct beneficiaries of this new economic niche that has emerged in the Begnas area.

Today, after the accessibility to electricity and the establishment of the television tower in Pokhara in 1995, people have been able to watch television in all corners of the village. Many of the houses own television sets and watch news and other programs broadcasted by Nepal Television as well as by other TV channels.

Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) started its service in Pachbhaiya village in 2000. Today, many of the houses have telephones. A private communication centre opened recently in *Khudiko Muhan* at the local bus station provides e-mail and Internet services to the local people.

The growth of the tourism industry vis-à-vis development of infrastructure such as telecommunication, electricity, etc. has attracted people from Pokhara bazaar and nearby areas to invest in businesses in Pachbhaiya. Many others are attracted towards this area with the purpose of settling down. This has given a sharp rise to the prices of land in this area.

**Environmental Changes:** There have been significant changes in the field of management of natural resources in Pachbhaiya. Some of these include (a) the regulation of local forest under the Forest Act 1993, (b) shift from

subsistence farming to the production of cash crops, and (c) regulation in the harvesting of natural resources, such as fish.

A forest covering about 20 ha. lies at the heart of Pachbhaiya village. This forest is the main source of firewood, fodder, litter, and various types of herbs for the local villagers. Before 1993, there were no rules for the harvesting of these forest products, and the rich and the powerful mostly benefited from the local forest.

However, after the registration of the local forest and as a community forest in 1995, the traditional ways of harvesting forest products changed. The community forest user group committee, which was selected by the general assembly of all users of the forest, decided how and when the forest products are harvested. The committee was responsible for setting rules for the harvesting of the products and punishing the defaulters. In Pachbhaiya the user group committee was formed under the chairmanship of a local Brahmin. The committee employed six *heralos* (forest watchmen) who reported to the committee in the case of violation of community forest rules. Anyone who tried to harvest the forest product before and beyond the harvesting time set by the committee had to pay fines.

According to the local villagers, the production of subsistence crops such as paddy, wheat, millet, maize, etc., has sharply decreased in Pachbhaiya in recent years. The villagers were attracted to the production of cash crops such as cauliflower, oranges, lettuce, etc. These products were in high demand in the tourist city of Pokhara and could easily be sold for high prices to local vendors.

Until 1995, fishing used to be an attractive occupation among the Pachbhaiya villagers. Many villagers including Dalits used to fish in the nearby Begnas and Rupa Lakes for both household consumption and sale. However, after the inclusion of Pachbhaiya village within the Lekhnath Municipality in 1994, fishing in both Begnas Lake and Rupa Lake became regulated by the local council. At present the municipality distributes licenses to the fishermen who wish to fish with nets and hooks in the lakes. The holders of the licenses have to pay certain amount of fee every year to the municipality in order to renew their licenses. Issuing of fishing licenses seems to be a significant source of revenue for the municipality now.

### Consequences for the Dalits

After the construction of a motorable road and the subsequent urbanization of the area, people from Pokhara bazaar and nearby villages were offering relatively high prices for land in and around Pachbhaiya. Taking this as an opportunity, local farmers were selling their land to those who wished to start their businesses and/or to settle down in the area. As a result, agricultural lands were being occupied by the businessmen and settlers who did not practice agriculture. From the money obtained by selling agricultural land,

the high caste landowners invested their money in various types of businesses such as retail shops, passenger buses, poultry farming, etc. The village agriculture was, thus, in jeopardy, and the services of the Kami and Sarki less sought for.

The rapid growth of the tourism industry in Pokhara bazaar after 1990 created employment opportunities for many. The coveted city life and monthly salaries attracted many Pachbhaiya young men of all castes. A big number of educated and semi-educated men, who mainly belong to the high castes, left the village to work in Pokhara bazaar as tour guides, accountants, managers, cooks, waiters, etc. As our interviews with some of these men working in Pokhara revealed that these occupations were being seen to be far more lucrative and prestigious than farming. This shift of interest among the local farmers from agriculture to other forms of livelihood affected not only the village agriculture but also the Dalit craftsmen who depended on it.

With the growth of Pokhara bazaar as a market centre, the Pachbhaiya villagers were becoming increasingly interested towards the quality of services available in the city. For instance, they started to visit Pokhara bazaar for the purpose of purchasing and stitching new clothes. Similarly, the availability of cheap readymade clothes imported from countries like China and India were replacing the clothes which were stitched by the local tailors. In marriage ceremonies, the local people started to hire musicians from Pokhara bazaar instead of the local Damai. The musicians from Pokhara bazaar, according to the local people, could play modern Hindi songs which could not be done by the local musicians.

As the subsistence farming became disrupted, Dalits were unable to fulfil their grain requirements through the traditional systems of *bali* and *majuri*. This was creating an intense pressure for the artisans to seek other sources of income from which they could earn cash income and buy grains and other goods of their daily needs. On the other hand, crops such as millet, wheat, vegetables, fruits, etc. could be sold in higher prices in Pokhara bazaar than in the village. Because of the high prices of agricultural produces in Pokhara bazaar, Pachbhaiya villagers had started to take their crops to this tourist city. As a result, grains, vegetables and fruits, which were commonly available and rarely sold for money within the village in the past, were becoming more and more expensive.

After the regulation of the local forest by the forest user group committee, the traditional artisans started to face the scarcity of many natural resources which were necessary for their occupations. The blacksmiths, for instance, required high quantities of firewood, but were not allowed to collect as much as they required. Similarly, the Sarki required the leaves and barks of plants including *Woodfordia* (dhairo), *Castanopsis indica* (katus), and *Myrrica esculenta* (kafal) in order to process raw leather. They, too, were not allowed to enter the local forest at the time they needed these products. Being

deprived from these natural resources, many of these artisans were forced to abandon their traditional occupations.

Thus, the downfall of traditional subsistence agriculture and local people's access to the market centre of Pokhara pushed the traditional livelihood strategies of the local Dalits to the margins. This would be a great challenge for the survival of Dalits who had nothing except their traditional skills. It was unthinkable for Dalits to participate in the growing tourism industry and the process of urbanization as they lacked both wealth and formal education. Some of the easily available sources of income for Dalits were, therefore, wage labouring and working as porters in the local bus station. A few young men of Dalit castes worked as helpers in the passenger buses which carried the local passengers to Pokhara bazaar.

### The Story of Labour Migration for the Dalits

Amidst this difficult crisis, some of the Dalits of Pachbhaiya seem to have chosen a new source of livelihood in the form of labour migration. At the time as our field study, a large number of Pachbhaiya men were working in towns in Saudi Arabia and Qatar as watchmen, carpenters, factory labourers, and home servants. From the 45 households under study, 15 young men had migrated to these countries. Some 20 Dalits had returned from the Gulf after working there for two years (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Labour Migrants from Pachbhaiya by Dalit Caste and Destination**

Caste	Destination		Total
	Gulf	India	
Damai	2	-	2
Kami	6	5	11
Sarki	5	-	5
Total	13	5	18

Source: Field Survey 2000.

During our field study, the 'Gulf mania' was so huge in Pachbhaiya that almost all of the young men whom we talked with had the single ambition in life, i.e., to find a job in the Gulf. The most popular topic of gossips and public conversations in the village used to be the individual labour migrants and the amount of remittances they were able to bring back. It was interesting to find that many local women could easily convert the Saudi currency (Riyal) into the Nepalese rupees even though most of them were illiterate. Moreover, most of the Dalits including children and elderly people in Pachbhaiya could eloquently utter the names of the cities lying in Qatar and

Saudi Arabia. A young Dalit confided that he could be labelled as *hutihara* (a coward) by his friends if he did not go to the Gulf at least once in his lifetime.

At this point it would be relevant to discuss the process of labour migration vis-à-vis its consequences for the lives of the traditional artisans.

If someone wished to work as a labourer in the Gulf region he contacted one of many manpower agents who had their offices in Pokhara. At the time of our study, the would-be migrant labourer had to arrange ninety thousand Nepalese rupees (1,200 USD) for semi-skilled job opportunities (such as driving, carpentry, security services, etc) and seventy thousand rupees (930 USD) for other unskilled jobs (such as sweeping, painting, etc.).<sup>5</sup> After necessary procedures, which took about two months, one could receive his visa and work permit for a two-years-period. Due to the lack of education and skills, the Dalits here mostly opted for unskilled jobs.

As revealed by individuals or the households involved in labour migrations to the Gulf countries, it was not so easy for most of them to put together the amount of money they needed to pay the 'Manpower company agents' in order to pay for obtaining a visa and other relevant documents. Some considered themselves lucky if they were able to get loans from their relatives and friends for which they had to pay a little or no interest. But many of them reported that they took loans from the local moneylenders, who were very often the high caste people who had sold their lands to the new settlers. In this case, the interest rate against the loan ranged from 24 to 36 percent per annum. Dalit informants also revealed that in most cases the loan amounts obtained by them was greater than what was required to pay the agents towards the visa fee and other expenses. The migrants confided that they needed the extra cash in order to buy new clothes for themselves as well as to leave some cash for their family members at home.

The information provided by the family members of the labour migrants indicated that an individual migrant earned from 6 to 8 thousand rupees (80-105 USD) per month working as an unskilled labourer while a semiskilled labourer made about 10 to 12 thousand rupees (130-160 USD). After meeting the costs of living at their place of work, the migrants were able to remit about half or a little more than half of their gross monthly income. The informants reported that normally an unskilled labourer's remittance in two years amounted to about 100,000 rupees (i.e., about 1300 USD) while that of a semiskilled labourer would be up to 160,000 rupees (i.e., about 2100 USD). Such net incomes were considered significant by the Dalit households in the study area. A summary of the details about the costs for migration, gross income and expenses and the saving that the migrant labourers are able to make is given in Table 6.

**Table 6: Reported Expenses, Income and Savings (in Rupees) for Individual Migrant Labourers in the Gulf Countries**

Labour type	Total cost	Monthly Income	Monthly Expenses	Monthly Savings
Semi-skilled (e.g., carpentry)	90,000	10,000-12,000	4,000	6,000-8,000
Unskilled	70,000	6,000-8,000	4,000	2,000-4,000

Source: Field Survey, 2000.

The Dalit migrants normally sent the remittances back home through one of their relatives or friends returning home on leave from work. But some cases the money was sent back through the money transfer agents also. One such agent had his office in *Khudiko Muhan* near the local bus station. While returning home from their work places in the Gulf countries (normally after working there for at least 2 years), the Dalit migrants also brought clothes, wrist watches, dolls for children, and other presents for their family members besides all their savings in cash. As revealed by the family members of such migrant labourers, the cash thus received at home would first be used to pay back the loan (both principal and interest) taken from the local money lenders at the time of sending the labourer away for work. Investments in purchasing property or in setting up businesses were possible only if they did not have to use the remittance in paying back the loans.

**Labour Migration: Has it been good for Dalits?:** The growing tourism industry and urbanization provided opportunities for many but not for Dalits. The caste background of Dalits deprived them of many of the occupations which were available in the new economic scenario. Besides, due to lack of formal education, Dalits were often outrun by the local high caste villagers in many areas of work. Therefore, Dalits considered labour migration as the only option left for them, and the only field where they could try their luck. Were they really lucky? Can this new occupation be described as sustainable source of income for Dalits? Let us briefly look at these issues.

Many Dalits in Pachbhaiya perceived labour migration as a path that had the potential of leading their families and themselves out of the situation of deprivation and poverty. In reality, this was not what had happened to most of them. Several explanations could be given for such failures. First, due to the heavy interest rates on their loans (24 to 36 per cent per annum), most of their earnings went back to the moneylenders. In most cases, very little money was left for a migrant labourer after he paid back his loans. In some cases, their total savings from their work abroad was so small that it was not even sufficient to pay back both the principal and interest amount of the loan. It was found that a few migrant labourers ended up parting with their

family's land property for not being able to pay back the loan. That is, they had to either sell their land in order to pay the loan or give their land to the money lenders in order to settle the debt.

Secondly, it was reported that most of the Dalits who worked in the Gulf received unfair treatment from their employers. They claimed that often they were subject to economic exploitation at their place of work. During our field study, we met three Dalits who recounted stories of how their employers cheated them and refused to pay them full wages when it was time for the labourers to return home.

Thirdly, the money remained after paying back the loans was spent on unproductive expenses such as changing the roofing of houses (from thatch to metal roofing), or buying clothes, watches, and other commodities. Since their incomes were not sufficient to buy agricultural lands from which they could secure their sustainable livelihood, living conditions of Dalits seem to have aggravated after some months of their return from the Gulf countries. This made them to incur more loans and use such money to migrate to the Gulf again for work. In this way, the cycle of borrowing money at very high interest rates and then struggling to pay back such loans seems to continue for the poor Dalits. In reality, it seemed that the local money lenders were the ones who were reaping the benefits of this wave of youths migrating to Gulf countries in pursuit of their unrealistic dreams of becoming rich in a few years.

Fourth, Dalit informants reported that as migrant labourers they were obliged to work under insecure and unhealthy environments in comparison to the locals in the countries of their destination. Most of them reported that they were given menial jobs at places like oil companies, factories, shops, ranches, farms, etc. Those who have returned home after working in the Gulf countries for some time claim that they find themselves less fit for hard physical labour now.

Finally, the absence of the household head from the family posed difficult challenges for the women and children of Dalits. The problems sometimes used to become more severe when, for instance, somebody in the family fell ill or when the mother was unable to provide food to her children. In some cases, women had even eloped with other men while their husbands were in the Gulf. Such hardships and occasional dissolution of conjugal ties have had serious effects on children's education and health.

### Concluding Remarks

Helena Norberg-Hodge, in her famous travelogue 'Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh' (1992) beautifully describes the throes of the Ladakhis of Little Tibet after their sustainable economy based on trade and cooperation crumbles down due to the heavy influence of 'modernization'. Her description of the growing process of urbanization in Leh, the capital of



Ladakh, and consequent changes in the traditional life-ways of the Ladakhis show that 'development' comes with challenges as well as comforts. It is evident that the Dalits of Pachbhaiya have been facing a similar situation after the economic and environmental changes in and around the village.

Environmental management and economic growth are considered necessary steps for the forward movement of any society. However, the consequences of the economic and environmental changes for the lives of underprivileged sections of society attract the attention of few (see also Shiva 1989). This paper was an effort to study and analyze the impact of such changes on the lives of the Dalits from a village in western Nepal. An attempt has been made to outline the challenges which these people are confronting after rapid changes in the rural economic and environmental scenes around them.

The process of management of environment involves relations of power. The management of the community forest by the local people of Pachbhaiya is a positive change because this protects natural environment and increases the sustainable use of natural resources. However, the Dalits who depend mostly on forest products for their traditional occupations get more marginalized after the harvesting of forest products is regulated. The low-caste identity and poor economic situations deprive the local Dalits from influencing the decision making processes of the forest user group committee. When the decisions are made by the high-caste people, the low caste Dalits cannot expect the decisions to be in their favour (see also Graner 1994).

One of the important dimensions of the environmental changes of Pachbhaiya, as mentioned above, is the shift from traditional subsistence farming to the production of cash crops. This shift has played a great role in the abolition of *bali* and *majuri* systems. When the sources of regular grains become disrupted, the traditional occupations of the local Dalits do not provide them sustainable livelihood. This shift helps the landholders to improve their economic conditions and pushes the landless Dalits to the side of the losers. Commercialization of subsistence agriculture, thus, promotes the conditions of poverty of those who have less control over resources, and increases the gap between rich and poor (see also Crow 2001, Toye 1987).

The process of urbanization and expansion of the market of industrial goods are considered as the hallmarks of modernization (see Preston 1996). However, these have serious and often negative consequences for those who cannot afford to pursue an urban lifestyle and consume 'new' commodities. This creates social pressure for the poor to exist in the local scenario by increasing the level of consumption of commercial goods. The labour migration to the Gulf can be seen as the result of these difficult situations being faced by traditional craftsmen.

The development of infrastructure does not always result in positive changes in the livelihood of the concerned people in a given locality. There have been significant developments of infrastructure in Pachbhaiya (such as motorable roads, dam construction, electricity, telephones, television, etc.). However, such infrastructure does not seem to have made much improvement in the quality of life of the poor people like the Dalits. In many cases, the local Dalits can rarely afford using some of these services (e.g., telephone, electricity, and television). The only consequences of these changes are the inequalities in life chances between the low-caste Dalits and others (see also G. Chhetri 1997).

It appears that lack of wealth among the artisans makes it difficult for them to benefit from labour migration also. Since they do not possess their own cash savings to invest in this venture but have to borrow money from others at exorbitant interest rates, whatever they are able to earn and save from their hard work in the Gulf countries goes to benefit the already rich money lenders. The Dalits could improve their fate in this regard only if they did not have to borrow money at very high interest rates from the local landlords and money lenders.

It could be concluded that Dalits have been the losers in the new situation. Their poverty and deprivation have not been reduced due to the new economic and environmental changes which have certainly created opportunities for others. In fact, many of the Dalits who were landless and socially discriminated have become further marginalized economically after their traditional occupations were rendered obsolete by the changes in the environment and society around them.

#### Notes

1. Pokhara is the administrative headquarters of Kaski district as well as the biggest city center in the Western Development Region. The study site in Lekhnath is at a distance of 13km by road from Pokhara. The Pachbhaiya villagers walked for about two hours from the village to Pokhara until the mid-1980s. Today, however, one can travel to Pokhara from here by local bus in just twenty minutes.
2. Field survey for the project on Livelihoods and Environmental change in the Hills of Nepal included the Brahmin and Chhetri farmers, shopkeepers, and other groups of people living in the area. Data on other groups of people will be presented in separate papers.
3. One *ropani* is equal to 0.2 hectare.
4. *Khet* is the local term for irrigated land.
5. *Bari* is the local term for unirrigated farm land including kitchen gardens.
6. This included the service charge of the local agents and airfare to the destination country.

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## CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS AND LIVELIHOODS: ADAPTATION OF THE JALARI PEOPLE IN THE POKHARA VALLEY

Ram B. Chhetri

### Introduction: Some Conceptual Issues

In his analysis of the ecologic relationships of ethnic groups in Swat, Barth (1981) makes a general statement that in plural socio-cultural contexts, "ethnic segmentation" and "economic dependence" remain as fundamental features. He further states that the environment for any particular ethnic group is not only defined by natural conditions, but also by the presence and activities of other ethnic groups on which it depends. Each group exploits only a section of the total environment, and leaves large parts of it open for other groups to exploit (Barth 1981: 3). It is in this context that Barth borrows the concept of a niche from animal ecology and defines it as "the place of a group in the total environment, its relations to resources and competitors" (1981: 3). The concept of niche and Barth's formulation of 'the total environment' is of some relevance to the discussion of the Jalari people in this paper. I agree with Barth that any single group of people can not exploit the total environment and that parts of it are left open for others to exploit. One example of this is the caste-based occupations people follow or the types of services people exchange[d] among themselves in Nepal and elsewhere. That is, each caste group would have its own 'traditional' occupation in the array of the total economic activities needed to keep the society going.

This paper discusses the changing livelihood strategies of the Jalari people who happen to be one of the many socially marginalised and disadvantaged groups of people in Nepal. The Jalaris included in this study live in Begnas area (named after one of the two lakes in the area). Before this, they were residents of an area once known as the Poda Tol (renamed as Naya Bazaar today) in Pokhara municipality. The total environmental context in Pokhara valley, which includes populations (of Jalaris and other communities around them), and population processes (growth and migration in particular), and natural resources (e.g. land and fish), provides the broader field within which the Jalaris have been situated in the present study. The main focus of the paper is the changing livelihoods of the Jalari people in Pokhara—in particular, looking at how the space (both physical and social) of their interaction have changed over time as a consequence of changes in the total environment around them. It will also review the unique social positions of Poda people (called Jalari in this paper) in Nepali society in order to put the Jalaris in the context of caste-based society in the country. Of all the people who were labelled as 'untouchables' in the traditional caste system, the Podes appear to be an anomalous case—since they remained