



Bihari K. Shrestha

# A HIMALAYAN ENCLAVE IN TRANSITION

*A Study of Change in the Western Mountains of Nepal*

Foreword

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*A Study of Change  
in the Western Mountains of Nepal*

**Bihari K. Shrestha**

*International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development*

*(ICIMOD)*

*Kathmandu, Nepal*

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Cover Plate: Forest Being Cleared for Agriculture: Jumla

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# Foreword

The Kingdom of Nepal is a network of many ethnic and caste groups, each with their own history, traditions, racial backgrounds, and social and economic characteristics and each of which either dominates, or shares with others, its region of domicile to form what is generally referred to as a distinctive cultural "mosaic" in South Asia.

While its characterisation as a mosaic betrays the impression of enduring inter-ethnic harmony and peaceful co-existence, information, is still scanty, despite the burgeoning amount of literature on Nepal, in regard to the contents and dynamics of the relationships between different social groups in the country.

This lack of information is even worse for the mountain regions of the country with their formidable and inaccessible terrains, apparent lack of resources and economic development potential, widespread poverty, and relatively unimpressive population numbers which have imbued national leaders, decision-makers, donors, and researchers alike with an attitude of ambivalence and have generally kept them away. The mountain regions of Nepal, for all practical purposes, remain the "forgotten land".

This present study is an attempt to analyse the life and economy in a mountain village in western Nepal and the interactions among its different Hindu caste groups as they go through the ever-occurring process of change in this Himalayan enclave. For the sake of comparison, it also draws upon a study carried out by the same author of the same village some two decades ago as part of the multi-disciplinary Karnali Folk Culture Study coordinated by the eminent Nepalese scholar and intellectual, the then Member of the Royal Nepal Academy, Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi. It is to be hoped that this study will contribute substantially to our knowledge of the poorest among mountain peoples and consequently point the way to measures of alleviating their dire poverty.

Dr. E.F. Tacke  
Director General

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The author is also grateful for the able assistance received in fieldwork for the study from his daughter, Satyabhama Shrestha, nephew, Dibesh Bhakta Mathema, and son, Saibya Shrestha. Above all, the author wishes to render his grateful thanks to the people of Diyargaon (a pseudonym) who, for obvious reasons, have to remain anonymous.

Bihari K. Shrestha

# Contents

## LEGEND OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

|  |                                     |   |          |      |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|----------|------|
|  | a quarter of a paise                | = | man      | Page |
| Frontispiece                                   | approx. 25kg                        | = | doke     |      |
|  | approx. 0.08 lbs                    | = | tal      |      |
|  | 45.44 litres                        | = | kal      |      |
| Chapter 1: THE ECONOMIC SCENE                  | a bunch of grass tied into a bundle | = | tal      | 1    |
| Introduction                                   | held within two palms               | = |          | 1    |
| Rationale and Objectives of the Current Study  | approx. 0.25 kg (0.5 lbs)           | = | man      | 2    |
| Objectives of the Study                        | 0.0157 lb                           | = | mano-mun | 4    |
| Conceptual Framework and Methodology           | a 50 paise coin                     | = | mohe     | 5    |
| The Setting                                    | approx. 75.8 kg (0.17 lbs)          | = | mu       | 6    |
| History  | a hundredth of a rupee              | = | paes     | 12   |
| Settlement Pattern                             | approx. 3.8 kg                      | = | pahe     | 19   |
| Population Changes                             | 0.0209 lbs                          | = | topani   | 19   |
| Division of Labour                             | five annas                          | = | supo     | 25   |
| Castes and Inter-caste Relations               | 11 annas                            | = | tal      | 27   |
| Family, Kinship, and Extended Social Relations |                                     | = | ungalo   | 29   |
| Religious Tradition                            |                                     | = |          |      |
| Conflict and Cooperation                       |                                     | = |          |      |
|  | the amount that can be contained in |   |          |      |

|   |  |  |  |    |
|---|--|--|--|----|
| Chapter 2: THE ECONOMIC SCENE                               |  |  |  | 31 |
| Agriculture   |  |  |  | 31 |
| Land Distribution   |  |  |  | 32 |
| Ownership Changes Between 1970 to 1990                      |  |  |  | 41 |
| Some Important Factors in the Dynamics of Land Distribution |  |  |  | 49 |
| Crop Production   |  |  |  | 55 |

*Dedicated to*  
*Crops and Their Rotation*  
*Forced Germination of Paddy Seeds*

**Professor John T. Hitchcock and Mrs. Patricia Hitchcock**  
 who, more than three decades ago,  
 initiated me into feeling at home in the villages of Nepal

*and to*

**Mr. Satya Mohan Joshi**  
 who pioneered the first multi-disciplinary study  
 by national researchers in the Himalayan Region  
 in the pursuit of his vision to extend  
 the frontiers of Nepalese scholarship.

## LEGEND OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

|                  |   |  |
|------------------|---|--|
| <i>dam</i>       | = | a quarter of a <i>paisa</i>  |
| <i>doko</i>      | = | approx. 25kg.  |
| <i>hal</i>       | = | approx. 0.08 ha  |
| <i>khal</i>      | = | 45.44 litres   |
| <i>lara</i>      | = | a bunch of grass tied into a knot and held within two palms              |
| <i>mana</i>      | = | approx. 0.45 kg (0.568 litres)   |
| <i>mato-muri</i> | = | 0.0127 ha  |
| <i>mohar</i>     | = | a 50 <i>paisa</i> coin   |
| <i>muri</i>      | = | approx. 72.6 kg (0.013 ha)   |
| <i>paisa</i>     | = | a hundredth of a rupee   |
| <i>pathi</i>     | = | approx. 3.6 kg.  |
| <i>ropani</i>    | = | 0.0509 ha  |
| <i>supo</i>      | = | five <i>pathi</i>  |
| <i>tola</i>      | = | 11 grammes   |
| <i>ungalo</i>    | = | an embrace with both hands or the amount that can be contained within it |

(Other Nepali terms are explained in the text)

## NEPALI CALENDAR

## ENGLISH CALENDAR

|                |   |                   |
|----------------|---|-------------------|
| <i>Baisakh</i> | = | April/May         |
| <i>Jestha</i>  | = | May/June          |
| <i>Ashar</i>   | = | June/July         |
| <i>Shrawan</i> | = | July/August       |
| <i>Bhadra</i>  | = | August/September  |
| <i>Aswin</i>   | = | September/October |
| <i>Kartik</i>  | = | October/November  |
| <i>Mangsir</i> | = | November/December |
| <i>Poush</i>   | = | December/January  |
| <i>Magh</i>    | = | January/February  |
| <i>Fagun</i>   | = | February/March    |
| <i>Chaitra</i> | = | March/April       |

# Contents

|  | Page      |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Frontispiece</b>  |           |
| <b>Chapter 1: BACKGROUND</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| Introduction   | 1         |
| Rationale and Objectives of the Current Study                              | 3         |
| <i>Objectives of the Study</i>   | 4         |
| Conceptual Framework and Methodology                                       | 4         |
| The Setting  | 8         |
| History  | 9         |
| Settlement Pattern   | 12        |
| Population Changes   | 16        |
| Division of Labour   | 18        |
| Castes and Inter-caste Relations   | 19        |
| Family, Kinship, and Extended Social Relations                             | 25        |
| Religious Tradition  | 27        |
| Conflict and Cooperation   | 28        |
| <b>Chapter 2: THE ECONOMIC SCENE</b>                                       | <b>31</b> |
| Agriculture  | 31        |
| Land Distribution  | 32        |
| Ownership Changes Between 1970 to 1990                                     | 41        |
| Some Important Factors in the Dynamics of Land Distribution                | 43        |
| Crop Production  | 46        |
| <i>Crops and Their Rotation</i>  | 46        |
| <i>Forced Germination of Paddy Seeds</i>                                   | 48        |
| <i>Ghaderi Crops</i>   | 49        |
| <i>Lekali Crops</i>  | 50        |
| <i>Crop Protection</i>   | 50        |
| <i>Production and Productivity</i>   | 51        |
| Food Sufficiency, Borrowing, Purchase, and Export                          | 51        |
| <i>Innovations, Constraints, and Priorities</i>                            | 55        |
| Horticultural Development  | 56        |
| <i>Walnuts</i>   | 58        |
| <i>Agricultural Labour</i>   | 59        |
| <i>Labour Requirements</i>   | 59        |
| <i>Labour Mobilisation and Wages</i>                                       | 61        |
| <i>Lagitya Remuneration</i>  | 63        |
| <i>Female Labour</i>   | 65        |
| Irrigation   | 68        |
| <i>Kumthi Management of Canals</i>   | 68        |
| <i>Competition for Water</i>   | 69        |
| Credit   | 69        |
| <i>Purpose</i>   | 70        |
| <i>Sources of Credit and the Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP)</i> | 70        |

|   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
|   | <i>Collateral</i>  | 72  |
|   | <i>Interest Rates</i>  | 72  |
| <b>Livestock</b>                            |  | 74  |
|   | <i>Types and Numbers of Livestock</i>  | 75  |
|   | <i>Changes in Livestock Ownership</i>  | 75  |
|   | <i>Seasonal Movement of Livestock</i>  | 77  |
|   | <i>Changes in Organisation of Pasturing</i>  | 78  |
|   | <i>Forces of Change Affecting Pastoralism</i>  | 80  |
|   | <i>Managing Fodder for Wintering the Livestock</i>                                     | 80  |
| <b>Chapter 3: FORESTRY</b>                  |  | 83  |
|   | <b>Dwindling Forest Areas in the Zone</b>  | 84  |
|   | <b>The Village Forests</b>   | 85  |
|   | <b>Deterioration of Village Forests</b>  | 86  |
|   | <b>Forests and Agriculture</b>   | 87  |
|   | <b>Forest Management System</b>  | 88  |
|   | <b>Government Intervention and Local Forest Practice -<br/>Its Promotional Posture</b> | 89  |
|   | <b>Government's Restrictive Posture</b>  | 91  |
|   | <b>Local Management of Forests as an Option</b>  | 92  |
|   | <b>A Typology for User Group Forestry</b>  | 93  |
| <b>Chapter 4: TRADE AND MIGRATION</b>       |  | 97  |
|   | <b>Extent of Seasonal Migration for Trading and Manual Work</b>                        | 98  |
|   | <b>Destinations, Purposes, and Wares in the Past</b>                                   | 100 |
|   | <b>Forces of Change in the Trade Regime</b>  | 101 |
|   | <b>The Current Trading Pattern</b>   | 103 |
|   | <b>Trading versus Manual Labour</b>  | 105 |
|   | <b>Returns from Working and Trading Trips</b>  | 107 |
|   | <b>Seasonal Migration: An Indispensable Safety Valve</b>                               | 108 |
|   | <b>Mushroom Gathering: A New Opportunity</b>   | 109 |
| <b>Chapter 5: VILLAGE POLITICS</b>          |  | 111 |
|   | <b>The Political Structure of the Village</b>  | 111 |
|   | <b>The Village Political Base</b>  | 113 |
|   | <b>Multiparty Politics and Village Factions</b>  | 117 |
|   | <b>Factions, Caste, and the General Election</b>                                       | 119 |
|   | <b>Traditional Social Order and Accountability of Leaders</b>                          | 120 |
|   | <b>Local Political Leadership and User Groups</b>                                      | 121 |
| <b>Chapter 6: DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS</b> |  | 123 |
|   | <b>The Karnali Bheri Integrated Rural Development<br/>(K-BIRD) Project</b>             | 123 |
|   | <b>Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP)</b>                                       | 126 |
|   | <b>Other SFDP Activities</b>   | 127 |
|   | <b>Drinking Water Project</b>  | 127 |
|   | <b>Health Interventions</b>  | 129 |
|   | <b>Immunisation</b>  | 129 |
|   | <b>Acute Respiratory Infection Control</b>   | 130 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Family Planning</b>   | 131 |
| <b>School</b>  | 132 |
| <b>Other Development Activities</b>                                      | 132 |
| <b>The Cooperative Society</b>   | 133 |
| <b>An Assessment of Development Performance</b>                          | 134 |
| <b>Chapter 7: CONCLUSIONS</b>  | 137 |
| <b>Population and Socioeconomic Changes: The Tightening of the Noose</b> | 138 |
| <i>Increasingly Desperate Search for Coping Options</i>                  | 140 |
| <i>Continued Mutual Cooperation: An Option for Survival</i>              | 142 |
| <i>Some Theoretical Implications</i>                                     | 142 |
| <b>Some Implications for Sustainable Mountain Development in Nepal</b>   | 145 |
| <i>Local-level Planning for Mountain Development</i>                     | 146 |
| <i>Participating Approach to Development Interventions</i>               | 146 |
| <i>Retargetting of the Poverty Alleviation Programme</i>                 | 147 |
| <i>Social Development of the Poor</i>                                    | 148 |
| <i>Capital Loans for Trading</i>   | 148 |
| <i>Women's Development</i>   | 148 |
| <i>Population Control</i>  | 149 |
| <i>Road Artery</i>   | 150 |
| <i>Non-farm Income and Employment Opportunities Outside the Region</i>   | 152 |
| <i>Multinational Firms for Mountain Development</i>                      | 154 |
| <b>Plates</b>  | 155 |
| <b>References</b>  | 161 |
| <b>Topic Index</b>   | 167 |

#### LIST OF TABLES

|     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 1:  | Caste Distribution of Population 1990   | 12 |
| 2:  | Distribution of <i>Jyula</i> Based on Class Categories  | 34 |
| 3:  | Distribution of <i>Bhuwa</i> Based on Class Categories  | 35 |
| 4:  | Distribution of <i>Lekali Bhuwa</i> Based on Class Categories   | 36 |
| 5:  | Consolidated Table Showing Total Owned and Total Operated Status of <i>Jyula</i> , <i>Bhuwa</i> , and <i>Lekali</i> Based on Class Categories | 38 |
| 6:  | Owned and Operated Land Based on Caste Division as Reflected by the <i>Bado</i>   | 40 |
| 7:  | Comparison of Land Ownership between 1970 and 1990 among the Sample Population of the Jachauri and <i>Bahun Bado</i>                          | 42 |
| 8:  | Annual Calendar of Major Crops on Different Kinds of Diyargaon Land   | 47 |
| 9:  | Comparative Yield Rates of Important Food Crops (MT/ha)   | 52 |
| 10: | Sufficiency of Household Food Production in Terms of the Number of Months   | 52 |

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 11: | Apple Tree Ownership                               | 57 |
| 12: | Walnut Tree Ownership                              | 59 |
| 13: | No. of <i>Lagi-lagitya</i> Households in Diyargaon | 62 |
| 14: | Calendar of Women's Activities                     | 67 |
| 15: | Extent of Debt                                     | 70 |
| 16: | Comparative Livestock Ownership in Diyargaon       | 76 |
| 17: | Calendar of Movement of the Diyargaon Livestock    | 79 |
| 18: | No. of People on Trading or Working Trips in 2047  | 99 |

|                                       |   |     |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----|
| 138                                   | Increasing Dependence on Cash for Coping Options                        |     |
| 140                                   | Continued Mutual Cooperation: An Option for the Poor?                   | 83  |
| 142                                   | Some Theoretical Implications of a New Forest Policy                    | 84  |
| 145                                   | Some Implications for Sustainable Mountain Development                  | 89  |
| 146                                   | Local-level Planning for Mountain Development                           | 91  |
| 148                                   | Participatory Approach to Development in Mountain Areas                 | 95  |
| 147                                   | Reorganizing the Poor: A New Strategy for Mountain Development          | 99  |
| 148                                   | Social Development of the Poor: A New Strategy for Mountain Development | 101 |
| 148                                   | Capital Loans for Improving the Poor's Income                           | 102 |
| 148                                   | Women's Development as a Strategy for Mountain Development              | 102 |
| 149                                   | Population Control: A New Strategy for Mountain Development             | 103 |
| 150                                   | Food Policy   |     |
|                                       | High Farm Income and Employment Opportunities Outside the Region        | 99  |
| <b>Chapter 4: TRADE AND MIGRATION</b> |   |     |
| 151                                   | Extent of Seasonal Migration in the Past                                | 99  |
|                                       | Destinations, Purposes, and Wares in the Past                           | 100 |
|                                       | Process of Change in the Trade Regime                                   | 101 |
| 152                                   | The Current Trading Pattern   | 102 |
|                                       | Trading versus Manual Labour  | 103 |
| 151                                   | Returns from Working and Trading Trips                                  | 103 |
|                                       | Seasonal Migration: An indispensable Safety Valve                       | 103 |
| 151                                   | Mushroom Gathering: A New Opportunity                                   | 103 |

## Chapter 5: VILLAGE POLITICS



## CHAPTER 1

# Background

---

### Introduction

Jumla, one of the most dreaded postings for Nepalese civil servants, is the district headquarters of the remote Karnali Zone in western Nepal. An old official milestone in Jumla states that it is situated at a walking distance of three hundred and forty-two miles northwest from the traditional Royal Palace of Hanumandhoka in Kathmandu. However, most civilian traffic from Kathmandu was detoured over the Indian railroad system re-entering the country at the border town of Nepalganj from where Jumla would still be at a distance of over fifteen days' journey on foot. Currently, however, it takes an hour and twenty-five minutes by Twin Otter flight from Kathmandu, but, for most inhabitants of Jumla, it is still a good six days' walk from the nearest bus-stop in the Surkhet Valley in southern Bheri Zone.

Diyargaon consists of two of the nine wards of one of the thirty Village Development Committees (erstwhile village *panchayat*) of the Jumla District and is in the northwest. It is situated at the head of the Hima or Sinja River Valley which is normally two days' walk over

river valley trails or one day's walk over high altitude mountain passes.

Unlike in most other countries of the world, mountain and hill areas predominate in Nepal and they represent 48.5 per cent and 28.5 per cent respectively of the country's land area (Chapagain 1976) and 8.7 per cent and 47.7 per cent respectively of its population (CBS 1984). According to the preliminary estimates of the 1991 population, the two regions continue to retain their numerical dominance with 7.82 per cent of their population in the mountains and 45.56 per cent in the hills (The Rising Nepal 1991). Therefore, given the country's topography, pattern of population distribution, and inter-regional dynamics and dependencies, the mountain area will continue to be a subject of priority concern in the larger scheme of national integration and development in Nepal.

Although the Karnali Zone joined the mainstream history of Nepal only after its annexation in the late eighteenth century, it was, for centuries earlier, a part of the scene of migrations and conquests that took place in the adjoining parts of present day Tibet in the north and India to the west and south. A Malla dynasty ruled and flourished in this region from the twelfth to fourteenth century and had its summer capital in Sinja and its winter court in Dullu in Dailekh District. Its break-up in the fourteenth century saw the rise of the Kalyal dynasty which ruled the Zone until the Gorkha conquest of 1788 (Bishop 1990: 51-129; Joshi 1971).

It was primarily the historic significance of the Sinja Valley that motivated the Royal Nepal Academy to undertake a multidisciplinary study of Diyargaon (a pseudonym) during the summer of 1970. The study covered history, geography, linguistics and folk music, literature and art, and included an ethnography of the *Thakuri* families of that village.

Although the study covered a very limited area in the Karnali Zone, it yielded a body of information which provided valuable insights into the life and economy of an otherwise little known region in the country. As a matter of fact, the existence and functioning of traditional irrigation user groups was first identified here (Shrestha 1971: 28-29) - a concept that later found its way into the government policy for local development nationwide and into the Decentralisation Act of 1982.

## Rationale and Objectives of the Current Study

International and national concern about the proper management and development of mountain areas has been increasing for some years now. It is inspired by a number of important considerations such as the need for their conservation as part of national and human heritage, for enhancement of the quality of life of the people living in these environs, for ensuring a more productive and optimal use of mountain resources, and for preventing disruption of downstream areas. Specific problems afflicting the mountain areas, such as poverty, deprivation, rapid population growth, and an increasingly over-burdened carrying capacity in the absence of alternative employment and income opportunities, are beginning to receive more serious attention (Tacke 1990:2).

Furthermore, Nepal's national development planners have long recognised the need for a holistic frame of reference through the medium of a regional planning approach in which inter-regional dynamics and integration have been the continuing theme since the Fourth Plan (National Planning Commission 1985: 229-237). A large number of studies too have been undertaken by both national and foreign scholars, providing information on different aspects of life and economy in the hills and mountains of Nepal (e.g., Bishop 1990; Seddon 1987; Mahat et al. 1987; Bajracharya 1983; Macfarlane 1976; Shrestha 1971; Caplan 1970). Several development programmes, e.g., the Canada-aided Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development Project, have also produced specific information pertaining to the priorities of these interventions.

However, these studies notwithstanding, the sources of information remain rather scanty with regard to the nature and direction of changes in them and to the documentation of how different forces interact with one another at the micro-level to produce them. Hoffpauir (quoted in Fox 1983:15) has rightly observed that "[while] a number of writers have offered general comments on the agricultural and environmental problems being faced by the mountain villagers of Nepal, the details of the processes at work still need elucidation." Therefore, the present study represents an attempt to shed some light on the nature of these processes towards developing an understanding of the dynamics of the mountain environment and its communities in Nepal. This information, it is hoped, will also be helpful in achieving the desired development goals in mountain areas.

## *Objectives of the Study*

This study, therefore, is designed to generate information on the changes in a mountain village in west Nepal over a span of two decades and to describe the underlying processes and the direction of these changes. While the frame of the study itself is intended as an approach to the study of dynamics in a stratified Hindu mountain community - that incidentally predominates the Karnali Zone (Bishop 1990: 159) - it is hoped that it will also provide useful insights for the formulation of ecologically-sound strategies for mountain development in Nepal.

In specific terms, the study has been designed:

1. to examine the changes in population, settlement patterns, socioeconomic structure, and services available in the community;
2. to understand the perception of the local people of the forces and direction of change and their pattern of response to them;
3. to assess the changes in the nature and extent of the use of natural resources, particularly the forest, by the community, and to examine the possibility of developing typologies for their user-based management; and
4. to try to derive some guidelines for designing interventions for the sustained development of mountain communities in Nepal.

## **Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

The conceptual postulates that have guided this study are discussed below.

Firstly, the Karnali mountains, while being physically quite remote, largely form an open system in that the subsistence of its inhabitants is possible based only on a continuous exchange of goods and services with economies at different elevations, including trading with Himalayan regions to the north and seasonal migration to the southern plains in Nepal and India to the south. This phenomenon has been sufficiently documented by previous studies in the region

(Shrestha 1971; Singh 1971; and Bishop 1990) and in similar geographical settings in India to the west (Sanwal 1989)<sup>1</sup>.

Two additional attributes have made it necessary for the Karnali communities to remain an open system. On the one hand, given the nature of the terrain, the agricultural land base is very small and, on the other, because of climatic conditions and the topographical situation, it is also characterised by a high degree of specificity. For example, Whiteman (1985: 159), writing about agriculture in Jumla, concluded that temperature, more than other factors, was the most limiting factor and that, in order to increase the efficiency of resource use, agricultural output per unit of this resource must be maximised.

Similar internal diversity has also been noted in Indian mountain situations based on the aspect, slope, and altitude of a particular location (Moench and Bandhopadhyay 1986: 6).

Because of the highly specific nature of mountain situations, the local inhabitants, in order to ensure their subsistence on a continuing basis, have to engage in a range of economic and social interactions at any given point in time with communities and economies beyond their immediate ecological 'niche'.

Such inter-locational and inter-regional exchanges and interactions constitute an integral part of what Bishop has otherwise termed "*the homeostatic state of life in the insular upper Karnali basin*" (1990: 350). However, the fact that such homeostasis is basically a dynamic concept has also been observed by Poffenberger (1980: 2) who stated that "*Social systems possess a tendency to re-establish some form of balance when confronted by changes of pressures that are systematically disruptive. This homeostasis has been variously termed as "stationary equilibrium process" (by Kurt Lewin), "structural functional equilibria" (by Talcott Parsons) and "steady state" (by Gregory Bateson).*"

---

<sup>1</sup> Berreman (1970: 84) has characterised an Indian *pahari* village as "a very closed system", because of the villagers' attitude towards strangers, i.e., "to studiously avoid and ignore" them. However, he also notes (1970: 95) the intensification of contact with the plains' people resulting in emulation of the plains' culture which he has termed "Plainsward mobility".

A process of change is a built-in phenomenon whether it is internally generated or externally imposed, and people continuously engage in the process of adjusting to the consequences of such changes. In this connection, Poffenberger further observes that *"while major demographic, ecological and socio-economic changes are recognised to varying extents .... what is clearly recognized is the impact of such changes in the form of grain deficits, alienation of land and so forth. It is these changes that the villagers know only too well and with which he has devised a multitude of measures of coping* (Poffenberger 1980:54). Thus, while changes in any community setting are constantly occurring, the people react to them by adopting a combination of options to maximise their gains, or otherwise minimise their losses, in their bid to continuously ensure their subsistence.

The choice of option, however, is a function of individual and collective perception of constraints and possibilities and of their own socioeconomic competencies. This is what would explain, for example, the differential attitudes of different people towards forest in different mountain situations either as potential agricultural land (Bajracharya 1983) or as a subject of proper management and maintenance (Mahat et al. 1987).

However, the perception of socioeconomic competencies is largely conditioned by the stratified nature of the orthodox Hindu social structure. Each individual household occupies a certain position in the socioeconomic hierarchy as defined by the social structure and internalises the competencies and disabilities enjoined upon it as a guide to its behaviour and responses to changes in the environment. Thus, in the traditional Hindu context such as that of Diyargaon, the hierarchical structure of society remains a major determinant in the choice of options in its bid to cope with those changes over time.

Furthermore, while caste hierarchy is an ubiquitous phenomenon in Nepal (Furer-Haimendorf 1966: 11-24; Bista 1967: 1; Shrestha 1973: 10-20), in a traditional Hindu enclave, such as that of the Karnali Zone and Diyargaon, due to historical reasons both caste and class have largely converged to become the dominant form of manifestation of stratification. Such phenomenon is also manifest further west in India where because of the caste-based disabilities enjoined upon the low strata, the higher castes are also economically dominant (Berreman 1970).

Corollarily, it is further in evidence that, in stratified village situations, political power tends to follow economic power, and this is also the case in Diyargaon. And this convergence of economic and political power then affords its wielder the prerogative to allocate scarce community resources, often for the promotion of his own vested interests (Shrestha 1971: 78-87).

Thus, the analysis of changes in Diyargaon is based on the concept of a "homeostatic state" which is understood as a moving equilibrium in which forces of change, both internal and external, confront the specificities of the local situation (such as a limited resource base and highly specific natural conditions), and in which the local people - their perceptions conditioned primarily by their station in the local social and economic ladder - continuously move through a range of options which is ever expanded in their bid to cope with the consequences of those changes.

The methodology of the study is based on the assumption that such changes in a community can be properly understood only through a holistic and in-depth method of investigation. Different aspects of life and economy in a household are mutually interactive with each other within the confines of the specificities of its social and economic competencies. The challenge, therefore, is to capture the dynamics of this at the level of the households and to try to identify and analyse the larger pattern involved. So the study has been conducted based on an in-depth anthropological method of enquiry. Given the objective that it is the study of change in a structurally stratified Hindu community, the sample of households for study was selected to reflect the social and economic diversity of the community. To that end, 42 households, consisting of five caste groups, namely, *Brahman*, *Thakuri*, *Kami*, *Sarki*, and *Damai* were selected for investigation.

In terms of method of investigation, household data, such as those on population, household economy, and social characteristics, were collected through detailed structured questionnaires which were substantially supplemented by in-depth interviews to generate additional information on the dynamics of those aspects.

Extensive interviews were also conducted with local officials to gather information on local development programmes. Office records were gone into wherever possible and pertinent (such as the decisions of the then village *panchayat*, etc).

## The Setting

Diyargaon is situated at an altitude of 2,600masl on the valley floor of the Sinja River, comfortably ensconced into a depression in the mountains range flanking it from the north. Thus, surrounded by mountain on three sides, the village has been built right at the foot of the hill with irrigated and unirrigated agricultural lands stretching out to the south all the way down to the banks of the river and making it one of the most impressive expanses of farmland and, by food-deficit Karnali standards, an important granary for the region.

With increase in population and the need for more farm land, the villagers gradually terraced the northern slope until about twenty-four years ago when, due to monsoon rain, a gushing torrent of mud and water engulfed a few houses in its trail, making it necessary to relocate them to a safer place. Ever since then, the pine forest further up the slope has been guarded zealously, and this includes a treeless ridge which some poor, untouchable households would like to cultivate.

The Hima or Sinja River is crossed by a wooden bridge that leads on to another stretch of farmland which, however, happens to be less fertile because of the shade from another pine-forested mountain that rises immediately to its south.

The Village Development Committee, of which Diyargaon is a part, is surrounded by the high cliffs (*lek*), like Ghurchi and Chuchemara to the north, Dori or Dor Patan to the east, Jaljala to the south, and Malika and Bare to the west (Singh 1971: 23) which are in the range between 3,000 to 4,500 m in altitude (Bishop 1990: 24-25) and remain snow-covered during winter and spring. They are further enclosed by what are called the Great Himalaya (northern arm) to the north and the Great Himalaya (southern arm) to the south (Bishop 1990: 17). Thus, for the people of Diyargaon, most movements outside of the village involve trekking over high altitude passes whether they be going up to Mugu and Humla to the north, to the Seti Zone in the west, or Dailekh and Jajarkot or beyond in the south (Singh 1971:239).

The climate here is "markedly dry and warm", characteristic of *"the low open intermontane basins of Karnali zone that lie in the rain shadows north of the Api-Saipal Himal and Chakhure-Mabu Lek"* (Bishop 1990:32). The closest meteorological data come from the station in Bumra village, about two kilometres upstream from Diyar-

gaon, according to which, in 1969-70, 9.6°C had been the mean annual temperature, warmest month July (16:1°C), and coldest month January (1.6°C). Total annual precipitation had been 1,225 mm of which 78 per cent occurred in summer and 20 per cent in winter. November had been the driest month without any precipitation (Bishop 1990: 37).

## History

Karnali Zone, despite its physical harshness, has been the scene of human occupation over the millennia. It is said that the present distribution of Himalayan peoples is the culmination of a long history of penetration by Mongoloid tribes from north and east and by Caucasoid groups from south and west (Bishop 1990: 61). Although the early history of the Karnali Zone is obscured prior to the eleventh century A.D., based on references to *Markandeya Purana* (an early Nepali text), Grierson (quoted in Bishop 1990: 68) suggests that the *Khasa* people reached western Nepal by the third to fifth centuries A.D. and may have absorbed numerically inferior indigenous hunters and gatherers, thus accounting for the absence today of any discrete non-Tibetan, Mongoloid group in the Karnali Zone (Bishop 1990: 68).

Historical developments in Western Nepal are closely associated with those in Kumaon and Garhwal in India rather than with those in central and eastern Nepal (Bishop 1990: 68). Beginning with the twelfth century, the cultural history of the Karnali Zone becomes increasingly clear. In the early twelfth century, Nagaraja founded the *Khasa* Malla dynasty with his capital in Sinja. His successors extended their kingdom to Kumaon and Garhwal in the west with a winter capital at Dullu in Dailekh district. Military incursions into the Kathmandu Valley were made on three occasions between 1287 and 1289, rampaging the place and temporarily occupying Nuwakot to the west of Kathmandu (Joshi 1971: 60-61).

The Malla Kingdom reached its zenith during the time of Prithivi Malla whose domain encompassed a territory as extensive as that of present day Nepal (142,000 sq. km.) and included Kaski to the east, the Tibetan provinces of Auge and Purang to the north, the Indian districts of Kumaon and Garhwal to the west, and the Dang and Surkhet valleys to the south (Bishop 1990: 76).

By the late fourteenth century, Prithivi Malla's reign was followed by the break-up of the kingdom and the emergence of what was known as the *Baise* (or twenty-two) kingdoms in its place. This process was assisted by the infiltration of Hindu Rajputs from northern India who moved into the Karnali region through Kumaon as well as into other parts of Nepal to escape the sustained strife and persecution perpetrated by Muslim invaders in India. At Sinja, a king called Jalandhar is believed to have ruled thereafter (Joshi 1971: 83) and the local Shahi *Thakuri* of Diyargaon claim that the word Jachauri is derived from the word Jalandhar.

The rule of Medini Verma, another *Khasa* king, is a historically recorded fact and he ruled in Sinja between 1393 and 1404, after which he moved his capital to Chhinasim. This, in turn, was later incorporated by a neighbouring Rajput interloper, Baliraj, who then controlled a territory further down the Tila River. For fifteen generations, from 1404 to 1788 A.D., Baliraj and his line of successors, known as the Kalyal kings (of the Shahi *Thar*), ruled Jumla, the largest, most populated, and most powerful of any of the *Baise* or *Chaubisi* (twenty-four) principalities (Bishop 1990: 112-113). It is interesting to note that the Shahi *Thakuri* of Diyargaon claim descent both from King Jalandhar as well as from the Kalyal dynasty.

The Kalyal line of succession continued until 1789 when the Jumla principedom was annexed to the kingdom of Nepal by Bahadur Shah after a battle that lasted more than a year. Following the conquest, a district governor (*subba*) with wide military and civil authority was assigned to rule over the place. Under the Shah rule, a compulsory labour system called *jhara* was introduced to meet increased labour requirements. A relay postal system called *hulak* was introduced. *Dharma shala* (rest houses) were built over high trails to ensure safe travelling. Land tenure and taxation were refashioned primarily to generate increased revenues. Farm lands were surveyed in 1805 and again in 1830-37 and *mato-muri* (0.0127 ha) and *ropani* (0.0509 ha) systems for irrigated lands (*khet*) and *serma* (cash assessments based on estimates) for *pakho* (unirrigated) lands were introduced. The district was subdivided into 18 *davas* for administrative purposes and revenue units (*mauja*) were created. Local influential people were installed in each of them as *jimmawal* for predominantly irrigated (*khet*) lands and *mukhiya* for predominantly unirrigated (*pakho*) lands and their authority touched all facets of village life (Bishop 1990: 128-136).

After the Rana Prime Ministers usurped power in the country from the monarch in 1846, for Jumla, as for the rest of the country, it meant "a 104-year continuation of exploitative and nefarious management by preserving the labour, land, taxation, and legal systems employed by the Shahs. Abuse, bribery, and corruption continued to be systemic." The civil component of district government grew in size and importance. A small permanent bazaar, the only one in the zone, was established by the *Newars* from Kathmandu who initially went there as civil servants (Bishop 1990: 143-145). This state of affairs continued until 1951 when a popular revolt overthrew the Rana regime and laid the groundwork for a representative system of governance in the country.

The post-1951 decades saw a number of reforms introduced in the country, including land reform, which, among other things, created better land records based on systematic cadastral surveys and abolished the *talukdar* system of land management and revenue collection. However, these measures are still to be implemented in the remote Karnali Zone with its extensive geography, relatively small population, and limited agricultural land. Thus, the *talukdar* system continues to reign in the area with all its attendant exploitative attributes, although its administrative powers have since been taken over by elected local bodies.

The people and culture of Karnali Zone today are largely the outcome of the historical processes of assimilation and absorption that have been active here for more than two millennia between the indigenous population, the non-Hindu *Khasa* migrants from earlier times, and the latter-day Hindu migrants from northern India. Except for the *Bhotia* population of Tibetan origin on its northern fringes, the rest of the inhabitants are Hindus belonging to different castes with variations representative of the distinctiveness of this process. While the Hindu caste structure and stratification, as elsewhere, consist of the *Brahman* at the top, followed in descending order by the *Thakuri*, *Chhetri*, and *Dum* or *Kansel*. The *Chhetri*, being the previous *Khasa* commoners, are the most numerous - 76,392 in a multi-caste population of 185,996 in 1969-70 in the Karnali Zone (Bishop 1990: 89.176) - and include the segment of *matwali* (or alcohol-consuming) *Chhetri* who "retain in their distinctive social and religious beliefs and practices the most vivid pre-Hindu tribal *Khasa* vestiges of any *Pahari* group or caste in Nepal" (Bishop 1990: 91).

Thus, despite the remoteness of the region, the people of the Karnali Zone have a very long history of interaction primarily with people coming from as far away as the plains of northern India and the areas north of the Himalayas. As a result, a cultural milieu unique to the region has evolved over the centuries which, as rightly observed by Connel (1991), a visitor from within Nepal or outside cannot fail to notice.

### Settlement Pattern

Diyargaon itself is a village of five castes and 113 households with the *Brahman*, or *Bahun* in colloquial terms (10 households) and *Thakuri* (35 households) together belonging to the *chokha* or 'clean' category and the *Kami* (42 households), *Sarki* (17 households) and *Damai* (9 households) belonging to the untouchable *kamsel* or *dum* category. The *Kami* households also include six of the *bitulo* or "polluted" households who were either excommunicated from *Thakuri* status in their own life time because of sexual liaison with untouchable *Kami* women or because they were the offspring of such union. The caste-wise population distribution is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Caste Distribution of Population 1990

| Caste          | No. of Households | Population |
|----------------|-------------------|------------|
| <i>Brahman</i> | 10                | 49         |
| <i>Thakuri</i> | 35                | 214        |
| <i>Kami</i>    | 36                | 200        |
| <i>Sarki</i>   | 18                | 84         |
| <i>Damai</i>   | 8                 | 41         |
| <i>Bitulo</i>  | 6                 | 36         |
| Total          | 113               | 624        |

Source: Fieldwork.

The village is divided into several neighbourhoods, locally called *bado*, which together surround and protect the centrally-located, sunny paddy seedbeds and are mutually segregated along caste lines. The Shahi *Thakuri* claiming descent from the Kalyal kings live in the central part of the village in Jachauri *bado*. It is flanked on the east by Acharya or *Bahun bado*, or the neighbourhood of the Acharya *Brahman*, and the Hamal *Thakuri*, the latter being the offspring of

unions between Acharya fathers and *Thakuri* mothers. The *Od bado* or the *bado* of the builder *Kami* (carpenters and masons), as distinct from the ironsmith *Kami* called *Lohar* and goldsmith *Kami* called *Sunar*, is situated on the northern periphery, *Damai* or *Dholi* (drum-beating) *bado*, or the *bado* of the tailor and musician caste, on the western fringe, and *Sarki bado*, or the *bado* of the cobblers, on the southwestern edge of the village. Interspersed among them are also the small, but still distinctly segregated, *Bitulo bado* or the *bado* of the polluted, *Mukti bado* or the *bado* of the *Brahmans* who originate from *Muktinath* in *Mustang* district and *Rachi bado*, another *Thakuri* neighbourhood.

However, the *bado* system based on residential segregation has undergone some changes in recent times. While the Acharya *bado* has now extended southwards along the trail called *Thado Goha*, which is emerging as the main thoroughfare to move in and out of the village, some impure (*bitulo*) families have also set up their residences in this expanded neighbourhood. Although the *bitulo*, because of their *pre-bitulo* ancestry and hereditarily stronger economic status, continue to receive from their *chokha* neighbours a manner of dealing similar to the one accorded to fellow *chokha* families, their status of being polluted requires them to avoid physical contact, including the exchange of food and drink. But the fact that they are no longer limited to the *Bitulo bado*, but instead have set up residences in neighbourhoods adjoining *Jachauri* and *Bahun bado*, represents a relaxation of sorts in the otherwise stringent caste rules in the village.

In recent years there has also been another kind of shift in the local settlement pattern. A few households from *Jachauri* and *Bahun bado* have constructed new structures for residential and commercial purposes in a new locality called *Chakha* on the south-eastern fringe of the village on the main trail between the *Sinja Dara* downstream and the high altitude *Jaljala Pass* to the district capital of *Chhinasim - Khalanga*. Fourteen such structures have been built. Three of them also house small stores selling stationery, soap, candies, cigarettes, noodles, and even local beer, although many more have closed down in the past because villagers bought things on credit and defaulted. Some such bankruptcy victims even wait for defaulters to set up their own stores, so they too can pay them in the same coin.

One of the important attractions for the emergence of this new "commercial" neighbourhood is the Multipurpose Service Centre which

houses Agricultural Extension and Animal Husbandry Sections, a Cooperative Society, and the Small Farmers' Development Project which was built under the Canadian-aided Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) Project. In addition, other services, such as the government sub-district Health Post and Post Office, have also been established in this neighbourhood. Because of the creation and convenience of these services in this locality, people are willing to take risks and remain undaunted by others' failure. They predict that this growth trend will continue. This optimism seems to be widely shared and the prices of this trailside land have already escalated far in excess of the going rate for normal agricultural land in the village.

In contrast to this new settlement, consisting entirely of dispersed dwelling units, the *bado* settlements in the village consist of *pagri*, an unbroken row of two to seven dwelling units locally called *dhwang*. However, there are also a number of recently-built single houses which too, after the separation of brothers, will most likely have a new house added to them at either end turning them into *pagri* too. A *pagri* is invariably inhabited by members of the same lineage, and death in any one of the households pollutes the whole population of the *pagri*.

Because the region is in a rain-shadow area and because the winters are extremely cold, roofs are low and flat and are made of layers of insulating and waterproofing materials such as birch leaves and dried pine needles. But the roofs and houses need to be regularly rebuilt. In Diyargaon, while thirty-four new houses have been built in the last twenty years, thirty-five have been rebuilt during the same period. However, it is predicted that not so many new houses will be built for a few years to come, because at present among the villagers there are not many boys of marriageable age who will get married and set up new domiciles.

All the houses in the village have two storeys and are built facing south against the slope of a land terrace at the back. The ground floor is for the livestock and is divided into several rooms, one leading to the next with the innermost (normally the third and devoid of any windows) being the warmest and, therefore, allocated to the calves.

The outer-most room without enclosures is normally used for feeding the cattle and, if sufficiently large, also for storing some firewood. The next room is used for cattle (and also buffalo if any) and occasionally also for other religious and social purposes such as performing *yagna*

rites (in which offerings are made to the fire) and as a place for women to spend their nights during menstruation. Sometimes, boys and girls meet at night for stealthy singing rendezvous. Larger and richer households have more rooms like this which are used separately for sheep, goats, and horses.

On the first floor of the house, the outside terrace (which is the roof of the first compartment of the cattleshed) is used as a thoroughfare between houses of the *pagri* and also as a place for informal neighbourhood congregations. The first room in the house, called the *ubra*, is an open place and used as a living area for visitors. If there is space, one or two large wooden containers in which grain is stored are also kept there.

The next room is the *borso*, also called *majh khand*, i.e., the central room of the house; this is the kitchen. It has storage space for more wooden bins and there is also space for sleeping around the fire in the middle of the room. Beyond this, the innermost room is the *bhandar*, literally the store, where more storage bins, some made of mud, are kept.

The size of the house, however, differs according to the economic status of the owner. Bigger houses provide more rooms and facilities such as separate bedrooms for married sons (and often also for a resident teacher who teaches in a local school and is provided with room and board in return for tutoring the school-going children in the family). As distinct from twenty years ago, when only one household had a latrine, which was used by only a few of its members, today, the village boasts of eighteen private latrines in different premises, two of which remain unused for fear of their becoming dirty. But a large number of people still have to defaecate in the open. The village lanes, which are the main play area for children, remain as filthy as ever.

Long wooden poles, which are intermeshed at wide intervals by horizontal poles, stand in front of each house. Paddy straw is stored on them for the consumption of cattle during winter. The size of these stands is a good indicator of the land-owning status and, consequently, of the relative economic standing of the household in the village. Also stored in front of the house are the piles of firewood which women collect regularly from the nearby forest, more so during the winter months when there is no agricultural work. Men and women alike generally believe that it is highly inauspicious for a woman to be

sitting or standing idle. Even an old woman with many daughters-in-law to assist her will still spin wool while she carries a youngster on her back. At the same time her attention will be on the household chores which her daughters-in-law are carrying out.

### Population Changes

Twenty years ago in 1970, Diyargaon had 89 households, with a population of 474 persons, and an average household size of 5.3. In 1990 the number of households was 113 and the population 624, representing an increase of 27 and 32 per cent respectively and a household size of 5.5.

Occasionally, out-migration of one or two households has been reported in the past, but this has not contributed significantly to a reduced growth of population in the village. There have been only two households in the last twenty years, one *Sarki* and one *Damai* household, which have moved from the village for good. Another thirteen *Kami* and *Damai* households have a member or two in India who have been gone only for a year or two working as labourers on construction projects, afterwards returning with some cash.

The death rate in Jumla is higher than the national average. The infant mortality rate in 1987 in selected communities was 189 deaths per 1000 live births (Pandey et al. 1991: 996) compared to the national rate of 144 for 1981 (CBS 1985). Similarly, the under-five child mortality was 313 per 1000 live births in 1987 (Pandey et al. 1991: 996) compared to the national average of 213 for 1985 (Ministry of Health and WHO 1988: 71). Therefore, the indications are that, because of these high mortality rates, the population growth rate in the study area has been relatively low.

Despite the slow growth rate, the people are generally aware of the unsustainability of an expanding population, because of the limited land for agriculture which remains the mainstay of the local household economy. Within the last four years, around twenty-six men (thirteen each of *chokha* and *kamsel* groups) have undergone vasectomy operations, although most of them have done so only after having fathered an average of at least four living children. More men are now waiting for another vasectomy camp to be held here. However, three deaths resulting from complications during such operations in the past

have also scared a number of potential acceptors. People are also scared of the possible loss of physical strength resulting from such an operation, because hard work is the sole basis for making ends meet. Some *Kami* and *Sarki* men even rationalise their disinclination for birth control - they feel that while girls are to be married away anyway, the boys, once grown up, can always find *chokha* land to till and make a living.

These excuses notwithstanding, the fact that the village is much more crowded nowadays can be seen from the mixed nature of many *bado* which otherwise were characterised by caste homogeneity. *Thakuri* households have infiltrated the once exclusive *Brahman* enclave of Mukti *bado*, and they have also moved towards the periphery of the untouchable *Dholi bado*.

A number of *kamsel* households have too little land to extend their houses or build new ones when their many sons come of age and get married. While they avoid the problem by saying that it is more the concern of the boys themselves, the only possibility they see is for some of them to move into the cattle shed or into the attic, or else to go to one's *chokha lagi* who, according to village tradition, should provide a small homestead for them.

For poor people, mostly the *kamsel* again, the problem is not only about a homestead but about the very means of livelihood. With limited land and less chance for clearing the forest, the obvious alternative is to move to the *Terai* or to India - a trend which is slowly gaining popularity, even with the reasonably well off. The situation is a cause of concern. While the rich traditionally exploited the poor and the helpless, the process has become even more intensified in recent times in the bid to assure for their children a reliable future. Public lands are increasingly being appropriated, if necessary by forming temporary coalitions even between otherwise long-standing adversaries. This is done to assert their strength and to vitiate any possible challenge from other less-organised aspirants in the village. Further pauperisation and ejection of the poor can only be expected to accelerate in the future.

In the past, the Malthusian solutions are said to have taken care of the problem of over-population beyond the carrying capacity of the habitat. Most people know about the cholera epidemic of 1975 B.S. (1918 A.D.) which was estimated to have taken a toll of some fifty to

sixty lives in the village. Because of the sudden drop in their food requirements and in labour power, the people were forced to abandon cultivation of the surrounding high altitude farm lands. While people could surmise this event based on the visible contours of the old terracing there, all these lands have now been cultivated once again, except for some parts, such as the plateau immediately above the village, where cultivation has been forbidden by a community decision in order to prevent the recurrence of the flooding that occurred in the village twenty-four years ago.

Bishop (190: 146), quoting Davis, has referred to this incident as the influenza pandemic of 1918 that spread from India. Local people further maintain that the region was regularly subjected to such epidemics. They recall the livestock epidemic of 1947 which, too, decimated the cattle population.

However, due to recent health interventions carried out in the area, a drastic reduction in the infant and child mortality rates has been achieved and a further aggravation of the population problem is now in the making. The Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) Intervention trial or, more appropriately, the Community Based Antimicrobial Treatment of Pneumonia, carried out between 1986 to 1989 (Pandey et al. 1991: 993) detected and effectively treated 80 per cent of the childhood pneumonia cases, resulting in a 28 per cent reduction in the risk of death from all causes combined over the three year period. However, the claims of the people of Diyargaon are much higher. It seemed to them that the infant and child mortality in the village was reduced by some seventy per cent. The field worker responsible for Diyargaon reports that 246 cases were successfully treated in 2046 B.S. (mid-April 1989 to mid-April 1990). He claims that there have been no more than eight to nine deaths during the last four years of intervention. The project has now proposed an even more comprehensive intervention designed *"to overcome the cumulative burden of disease responsible for much of the remaining mortality"* (INTERCEPT: 2). The population of Diyargaon should, thus, record a sharp increase in population in the years to come.

### **Division of Labour**

A longstanding division of labour between sexes exists in Diyargaon. According to this division, men engage in trading, acquiring more

agricultural land, and providing women with clothing and golden ornaments for the nose, ear, and neck. It is said that men become the subject of ridicule if their wives are not properly clothed. However, a cursory glance at most village women cannot fail to tell a visitor that this part of the men's task is not taken very seriously.

Women, on the other hand, concern themselves with land cultivation and increasing food production. To this end, they undertake planting and manuring of seedlings, transplanting them, and preparing food for the large contingent of labourers for the planting operations in which they also participate. They also collect and carry huge loads of pine needles from the forest to be used as bedding for animals and eventually as fertiliser; carry manure, which is applied in very high doses, to the outlying fields; weed the fields; pound rice at home; or bring sackloads of other food grains for grinding to one of the water mills in the vicinity. Their jobs also include carrying implements and day-time meals to the field, breaking sods, and of course, bringing the harvest home. A sublime observation of one of the many card-playing men in the village has it that women in Jumla are a system of "free transportation". In the house, cooking, cleaning, cattle feeding, tending the cowshed, piling manure, pressing oil, washing, and winnowing are all carried out by women. Younger and stronger women are mostly assigned to field and forest jobs, although this does not preclude extensively assisting the older ones at home. Going to bed late and getting up early, as well as staying away from men and husbands in public, are appreciated.

### **Castes and Inter-caste Relations**

According to the standard *Varna* model of Hinduism, the caste system has four castes, namely *Brahman* - priests and religious teachers; *Kshatriya* - kings, warriors, and aristocrats; *Vaisya* - traders, merchants, and people engaged in other similar professions; and *Sudra* - cultivators, servants, and so on (Sen 1961: 28). But a five-fold division with untouchable castes coming at the bottom of the hierarchy is also recognised (Ghurye 1961: 7). In the case of the Jumla caste system, however, Campbell observes that it is a kind of modified version of the *varna* system of the Sanskritic model. While the relative caste (*jat*), ritual status, and occupational traditions derive from the *varna* model and are comprised of the fourfold division of

*Brahman, Kshyatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra*, the Jumla model itself has, over the centuries, undergone a considerable amount of adaptation (Campbell 1978: 87-110).

In the hilly regions of Nepal, mostly in the more remote western mountains, such a modification or adaptation has been expressed in the caste hierarchy being divided into two major segments, namely, the high caste *Bahun* and *Chhetri* (the colloquial versions of the otherwise more esoteric terms of *Brahman* and *Kshatriya*), on the one hand, and the untouchables on the other. The occurrence of a similar division has also been observed in the lower Himalayas west of Nepal where it is comprised of "the dominant high or twice-born castes ('big caste' in local parlance) made up of *Brahman* and *Rajput*, and the 'untouchable' (*achut*) low 'small' castes" (Berreman, 1970:77).

Despite this divergence, however, the essential features of the caste system, generally understood to consist of the segmental division of society, intercaste hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and restrictions on marriage (Ghurye 1961: 2-17; Srinivas 1969: 265-269) continue to be valid for characterising the hill variant of the two-fold system. It is against this background that the castes and the inter-caste relationships in Diyargaon can be properly understood.

The Jachauri *Thakuri* families represent the oldest inhabitants in Diyargaon. Their lineage mostly consists of members of the exogamous Shahi clan, but it also includes some Malla clans, another *Thakuri* clan who, although potential affinal relatives to the Shahi clan, observe for all practical purposes the same rules and norms of behaviour as agnates of the Shahi clan, because their ancestor was imported from Mugu district a few generations earlier in matrilineal marriage to a daughter of Shahi parents without a male offspring.

The Jachauri families who, as stated earlier, claim their descent from the *Baise Kalyal* kings, historically claimed considerably large tracts of forest land and enjoyed the annual tribute in cash and kind paid by the beneficiaries for permission to cultivate them. They treated farming as something beneath their "royal" status and, instead, found glory and reward in more sporting pursuits such as hunting in the forest for prolonged periods during winter, or snaring, training, and exporting falcons.

However, the changing times saw the alienation of their title to the forest and the tributes therefrom, cessation of hunting rights by the Forest Department, and the abrupt end to the demand for their birds of prey following the domicile of the falcon-sporting Nawabs in Pakistan after the partition of India. All these resulted in the rather rapid erosion of their economic and political prowess, apart from in the case of a few families who, having read the writing on the wall, made their fortunes through trade between Indian border markets in the south and the remote mountain hinterlands to the north, including the trans-Himalayan trade marts on the Nepal-Tibet border. But the fact that they had such a glorious past has not been forgotten in their dealings with the rest of the community, primarily in those with their more successful neighbours and relatives in the *Bahun bado*.

The Acharya or *Bahun bado* consists of members of the Acharya lineage, which also includes the Hamal *Thakuri* who are the offspring of unions between ritually superior *Bahun* fathers and politically powerful *Thakuri* mothers. The progenitor of their lineage came from a place called Baralamji in Dullu in Dailekh district, during the Malla period many generations ago when Dullu was their winter capital. The Acharya *bado* has eighteen households, and these include ten Hamal households, seven Acharya, and one Shahi who, as is the case with the Jachauri lineage, has been brought into a Hamal family in a matrilineal marriage for want of a male offspring.

Basically a farming population, the progenitors of the Acharya and Hamal families in Diyargaon, based on their ritual superiority as members of the twice-born caste, political power, and the culturally-determined subservience and obeisance of the *dum* castes, considerably benefitted from what Barry Bishop (1990: 116) called "*the Brahman-Thakuri consortium*" to intensify and entrench "*all facets of Hinduism*." The Acharya families have been some of the principal beneficiaries of the system of land grants in the past, and their advantage has continued in terms of their claim to cultivable forest lands. Consequently, the Acharya and Hamal families together enjoy a distinctly higher economic and political status in the community, and included in their ranks is a family of government-appointed, hereditary revenue officials with considerable power to oppress and exploit tax payers.

The third caste category is that of the *dum* (also called *kamsel* in local parlance), who, in turn, consist of three non-interdining endogamous

occupational caste groups, *Kami*, *Sarki*, and *Damai*. The *Kami* are further divided into sub-groups such as the *Od Kami*, i.e., carpenters and masons, *Lohar* blacksmiths, and *Sunar* goldsmiths. Similar divisions exist also among the *Sarki* and *Damai*.

The *dum* too are hierarchically stratified and come under the same order of *Kami*, *Sarki*, and *Damai*. In Diyargaon, the *Kami* are the most numerous, representing thirty-six households and two hundred people. Their progenitor had accompanied the aforementioned Acharya ancestor from Dailekh. Without them, life for the Acharya and *Thakuri* families would have been unthinkable, because the twice-born castes of *Brahman*, *Thakuri*, and *Chhetri* are ritually forbidden to plough the field. The *Kami* and *Sarki* of the *dum* population, therefore, constitute the indispensable agricultural labour force in the orthodox Hindu context. The *Damai*, however, traditionally do not plough for others.

As masons and carpenters the *Od Kami*, whose inventory of tools is limited to an axe, big and small chisels, and a tiny pointed scraper (except for one who recently obtained a saw and a plane) have been relatively better off than other occupational caste groups. This results from the increasing population in the region and the need for more houses. While not all *Kami* are builders, a good number of them who are have a clientele spread over a wide geographical area. In distant locations they remain in residence until the building is completed. Winter and spring are the building seasons when farm work is limited, and most other males are absent from the village for seasonal migration and for the annual procurement of basic necessities in Nepalganj. The builder *Kami*, however, meet their needs either by buying from fellow villagers or from the itinerant traders from Mugu. Often the client for whom the house is being built brings the needed supplies upon his return.

Houses are not built on a daily wage basis but through a traditional mode of contract under which, once completed, the total cost is estimated by the owner and the builder with third party arbitration. The builder receives half of the amount thus agreed in cash, kind, or even deferred payment, and the other half is retained as the owner's share represented mainly by meals provided during the construction period.

They also specialise in making ploughs and local wooden containers for storing grain. The latter are made of wide planks from the trunks of big trees for which, because of continued depletion in forests closer to

home, they have to trek increasingly longer distances involving several days' transportation. While incomes from these trades and building contracts still amount to relatively small sums of money, given the scarcity of employment and income opportunities in the village, a number of *Od Kami* have economically distinguished themselves from a large number of less fortunate fellow *kamsel* and a number of *choka*, mainly the *Thakuri*.

The *Sarki*, the second largest *kamsel* group, specialise in hides and leather products such as shoes, snow shoes, wooden snow shovels, sieves made of entrails, and flails for threshing. They also perform dances during marriage festivities in the village. They have been in the village for eight generations and come from a village about a day's walk downstream. Initially they lived on the northern edge of the village next to the *Kami*, but, with increasing population and limited space, they sold the land and moved to the western edge of the village on to the property of a rich landowner to whom they are completely beholden.

A few years ago, they too took up the building trade, which one of them learned from a *Kami* friend, and rapidly disseminated it to a few fellow *Sarki*. However, most able-bodied *Sarki* go to the south in early December in search of food and money and return home early April for the next agricultural season.

The *Damai* (smallest of the three groups) have the most difficult time. While their occupation involves tailoring and playing music at religious and social ceremonies, because of the change in taste of their clients, they have lost much of their former business to the tailors and readymade stores in the urban areas of Nepalganj and Kathmandu. Unlike the *Kami* and *Sarki*, they have remained steadfast in not taking up ploughing for others, despite pressures from the richer *Brahman* and *Thakuri* families. Consequently, they are the most oppressed in the village. Three households have permanently left for India, and it is normal for them to have able-bodied males working in unskilled jobs in India for a year or two at a time. They too, like the *Kami*, have clients in surrounding *Chhetri* villages up north which they like better and where they remain in residence as tailors for several weeks in a row. Occasionally, they have even threatened the high caste villagers that they will move to other villages, resulting in, by implication, the possible loss of music for their rituals - only to be told that the services of a tape recorder would be used instead.

The *dum* population in the village, as in the district, is the poorest of all, although poverty is not limited to them. Service to the high castes has been the *dharmic* role prescribed to them (Campbell 1978: 214) and they are to render necessary ritual and other occupational, often unholy, services (such as dealing with hides, or putting a yoke around the holy bullocks for ploughing) to their holier, twice-born masters. In return, the masters are to take care of all their necessities. The basic manifestations of this relationship are still in existence today; for example, in the institution of *lagi-lagitya* under which each *chokha* household in the role of a *lagi* hereditarily retains at least one household each of the three occupational castes of *Kami*, *Sarki*, and *Damai* as *lagitya*. A number of *chokha* households also have a *Sunar*, (goldsmith), who as a *lagitya* lives in a village next to Diyargaon.

In the capacity of *lagitya*, the *kamsel* render to their *lagi* the specialised services mentioned earlier, in addition to three or four days of labour that they contribute during each of the winter and summer harvests. In return, each of them traditionally receives fixed amounts of grain twice a year following the barley and paddy harvests. It is said that, in the past, *lagitya* used to be even bought and sold as slaves.

A number of richer households also keep a few of these households in a special *haligado* relationship, under which robust and diligent *Kami* or *Sarki* are given a plot or two of paddy land to cultivate for themselves, in return for commitment to work exclusively as their ploughmen. Under this arrangement, during working days the ploughman receives meals but no wages. The amount of paddy land leased out to him depends upon the size of the estate of the *chokha*. It is the fear of having land confiscated that prevents the able-bodied *Sarki* and *Kami* men from attempting long-term migration to India.

A *haligado kamsel*, as claimed by the *chokha*, has to be treated as a member of one's own household and is the beneficiary of largesse in terms of used clothing; interest-free loans; gifts after trading trips; bigger gifts, such as a cow or a goat, on the occasion of a marriage in the *lagi* household; seasonal fruits such as apples (for the *kamsel* have none); a place to build a house if he has no house; and even interest-free money for marriage ceremonies.

But most *kamsel*, however, are exploited by the rich *chokha*. While a few *kamsel* households have some unirrigated land in the village, most have a little more land at higher elevations. But these are meagre

holdings and, therefore, substantial supplements from the *chokha* in the form of land or wages remain an indispensable necessity. Interests on loans are uncontrolled and are over 60 per cent a year. The three *kamsel* groups, although more numerous than the *chokha*, are endowed with mutually different socioeconomic attributes locking them into a situation of competition against each other that undermines the possibility of *kamsel* solidarity. But all of them, along with the poorer segments of the *chokha* population, however, agree on one point that, in terms of the goodness of its inhabitants, Diyargaon is one of the worst to be found anywhere in the Jumla district.

### Family, Kinship, and Extended Social Relations

In all the caste groups in the village, the nuclear family pattern continues to predominate and accounts for around sixty per cent of all households. Such a family would normally consist of the parents, the unmarried children, and occasionally also an unmarried brother and sister. Extended families consist of parents of a widowed mother, other married or unmarried male siblings, unmarried female siblings, and children. There are also a few joint families in which usually a younger unmarried brother or sister lives with the older one. Richer families generally tend to be larger and there is one instance of a joint family existing for the express purpose of capitalising from the specialisation of responsibilities between brothers - one managing the household and the other local and district politics. Otherwise, establishing a new household following marriage is considered the norm. There is only one instance of a polygamous marriage with two wives living together.

The households in each *bado* are generally the members of an exogamous lineage and, therefore, most women are married out of the village. However, the Hamal-*Thakuri* of the Acharya lineage do marry Shahi girls of Jachauri *bado* or a *Brahman* may marry a Shahi girl in a hypogamous marriage. Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is condoned but not preferred.

Given the dearth of markets and the limited monetisation of the economy, the institution of *ista*, literally meaning bosom friend, represents an important extension of the social relations in Jumla with significant economic implications. A person, usually male, enters into one of the half a dozen possible forms of such a relationship with

different degrees of mutual warmth and cordiality. But the underlying motivation for such a relationship is the reciprocal exchange of goods and services between different altitudinal zones and geographical regions, the latter necessitated by regular trading trips (Shrestha 1971: 68-77).

While a *heetko ista* is a *ista* relationship established between two individuals following a good turn done by one to the other, a *dharma ista* is a more hallowed relationship and is characterised by a high degree of mutual respect, love, cordiality, and selflessness. A *mate* (meaning earth) *ista*, in contrast, is a relationship established by a high altitude farmer with another from the valley floor, such as Diyargaon, where the former grows paddy in the field owned by him and lets the latter keep its straw, as well as grow winter barley in it, of which the former has plenty in his own village. In exchange, the latter provides the former with bullocks for ploughing and manure for the paddy crop.

*Sangi*, literally a fellow traveller, is another form of *ista* and is an honorific term used to address the other person. It connotes a degree of special friendship between the two which can also be ritually sanctified by the giving of *tika* (an act of worship on the forehead) to each other.

Similarly, if two persons happen to have identical names and like each other, they enter into a *baisali* relationship which is formalised by either a simple exchange of *tika* or more elaborately by having a priest preside over the function.

However, the most serious of all the *ista* relationships is the *mit* relationship which is entered into only after a long probation. Each confers upon the other the status of a family member in each other's family, evoking a high degree of mutual consideration and respect, and this relationship is inevitably sanctified by an elaborate ritual.

Whatever the form of the relationship, however, in the environs of Diyargaon, as stated above, it thrives basically on the exchange of goods and services. While mostly agricultural and cottage industry products are exchanged between the *ista* at different elevations, for those who trade, *ista* come in very handy as hosts in distant locations. They know that they have to have friends in different places because strangers are not helped. The *Jumli* are certainly not known for

hospitality. Thus, while everybody has a *ista* of one kind or the other, those having to travel a lot have many. New *ista* relationships are easily made. Since the relationship is economically valuable, every *ista* makes a studied effort to nurture and sustain it by strictly adhering to the underlying rules of reciprocity. As the local saying goes, if an *ista* is served a cup of curd, he should take it only after quietly measuring it with a bamboo shred.

## Religious Tradition

The village, as in the rest of the Karnali Zone and beyond, is steeped into a highly distinctive religious tradition of its own. While being professedly Hindu, it does not give prominence to the standard members of the Hindu pantheon such as Shiva, Vishnu, and Ganesh who in the context of Jumla have been characterised by Campbell as "*hidden gods*" (1978: 199). It is presided over by a cult of incarnating gods called *Masta* who in turn are considered to be the sons of the Hindu god Indra. Local people also classify the two pantheons of *Masta* and Hindu gods as incarnating versus non-incarnating or possessing versus non-possessing. The *Masta* pantheon, in popular belief, is composed of "twelve" *Masta* brothers and their nine *Bhāwani* sisters, although there is hardly any consensus, amidst a much longer list of their names, as to the composition of the membership of the former. The *choka* and the *kamsel* worship a different set of *Masta*.

The distinctive characteristic of the *Masta* brothers is that they have no images, unlike the Hindu gods. Instead, they manifest themselves through their oracles, called *dhami*, by temporarily incarnating them. As proof of this the oracle goes into a state of possession, dwells on the life history of the god being possessed and his heroic deeds, and performs a miracle called *bhed garnu* to impress the audience of the authenticity of the incarnation. The author himself has witnessed one of the oracles rubbing a pinch of rice between his two palms, and this was later found to have turned into a black paste. Another one too, having also taken a pinch a rice, turned it into a *saligram* stone (amorite).

Once possessed, the *Masta*, or the possessed oracle, consults the devotees who have propitiated or "summoned" him to seek redressal for one or more of their problems such as sickness in the family; persecution by enemies; forcible eviction from one's land; theft; robbery

and arson; wife or cattle having difficulty in delivery; being without issue or son, drought, business losses; buffaloes not yielding milk; abduction of one's wife; or other similar misfortunes (Shrestha 1971: 97). Each of the devotees are given specific prescriptions. However, people have become more ambivalent about the *Masto*, once a highly feared deity because of the power to send merciless retribution to offenders, and the deity has suffered a set back in recent times.

Despite this tradition, however, Brahmanic Hinduism also remains significant in that the life cycle rituals are appointed by *Brahman* astrologers and performed by *Brahman* priests, except in the case of the *kamsel* who, being untouchable, are not served by *Brahman* priests, and, therefore, have one of their own relatives perform the rituals.

### Conflict and Cooperation

Given the highly limited cultivable land base, the utter poverty of most of its inhabitants, the need to continuously struggle just to survive, and the extreme harshness of the environment from which they eke out a living, inter-personal relationships have, for generations, been characterised by the paradox of mutual competition, conflict, and cooperation at the same time. Although most go out for seasonal or extended migration in order to supplement their meagre incomes from the land, the belief that the enhancement of one's wellbeing depends, to a great extent, on the successful short-changing of one's neighbour has been deeply ingrained in their attitude towards fellow villagers and strangers alike. While not all resort to such methods, loan sharking, swindling, land grabbing, craftiness in trading, and feigned humility towards the strong and the powerful have been some of the manifestations of this conviction. Alliances, explicit or implicit as occasions demand, are easily forged, sometime even between long-time antagonists, and are dissolved just as conveniently depending upon the expediency of the situation.

On the other hand, however, the village is also the home to an encompassing network of traditional participatory institutions that cut across such cliques, castes, and other groupings and pertain primarily to the management of community assets, infrastructures, or general economic pursuits and services.

Such cooperative arrangements are reflected in the *parma* system of agricultural labour exchange, a local beneficiary group for irrigation management, mutual winter crop protection arrangements, forest protection arrangements, a bi-annual system for community collection of pine needles, a cooperative system for joint grazing of livestock at high altitudes, and so on. While most of these institutions are traditional and have been handed down through the generations, new ones are also created and sustained as in the case of the recent drinking water system in the village. Thus, the ubiquitous incidences of strife and rivalry do not preclude continuous mutual cooperation among the people, without which the larger goals of existence simply cannot be realised in this remote and harsh rural setting.

## The Economic Scene

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The Diyargaon economy, like that of most of the Karnali Zone, is a highly complex subsistence system. While it is dominated by an annual cycle of farming punctuated by transhumance, its paucity in terms of size and production makes it necessary for most households to supplement it through a number of other non-agrarian pursuits within their immediate environs and farther afield. Some of these are highly demanding of the inhabitants' traditional capacity for enterprise, wit, charm, and craftiness, if not also exacting in terms of sheer physical endurance.

### Agriculture

The quest for extending their meagre holdings over the years has brought the people of Diyargaon to higher and remoter elevations from the village. Their farming land today is of two major kinds, the first consists of the irrigated paddy lands generally called *shar* (irrigated rice land) but locally referred to as *yuia* and the unirrigated land generally known as *pakho* and locally called *shuwa*. The second category is the *lekali bhuzia* (more frequently called only *lekali*), i.e.,

## CHAPTER 2

# The Economic Scene

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### Agriculture

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*bhuwa* on the *lek* or high cliffs which are situated at an elevation of half an hour's climb or more from the village.

The *jyula* is the most preferred of all lands and consists of three kinds, namely, the standard *jyula* called *jawadi* where the two-crop cycle, mostly of paddy and barley, is grown (barley is *jau* in Nepali; hence *jawadi*), the *chyute* where only one good crop of paddy a year is grown because of mountain shade on the winter barley, and the *seem*, i.e., swampy land, which also gives only one good crop of paddy a year.

*Bhuwa*, or more appropriately *ghaderi bhuwa*, i.e., the *bhuwa* where the homestead is located, is the next preferred; it is unirrigated land in which a fairly large assortment of crops, such as barley, wheat, maize, millet, and beans, are grown. But if irrigation water were to be available, this land could be converted into *jyula* to grow the preferred crop, i.e., paddy.

In recent times, much of the *bhuwa* has been converted into paddy fields, and the consequent shortfall in non-paddy crops has been made up by expanding the *lekali* holdings at higher elevations where all lands are unirrigated and produce only one crop a year because of the prolonged cold.

As with the *jyula*, there is a great variation in the productivity of the *lekali bhuwa* depending upon its distance from the village. Where it is a manageable distance of an hour or so, cattle can be brought from the village for extended durations for fertilising the field, and this ensures cultivation every year of a combination of different crops such as barley, wheat, potatoes, beans, and gourd, with the first three being given priority.

## Land Distribution

Two adverse attributes of land ownership in Diyargaon are that, first, it is extremely meagre in terms of its total availability and that, secondly, its distribution is highly skewed and largely follows the traditional caste-based social order. According to the local system of ranking the relative economic status of households, they are divided into three categories and the primary indicator used is the frequency in daily consumption of rice.

According to them, people of the highest status consume rice as their staple every alternate meal for six months, followed by another six months of one rice meal alternated by four meals of wheat, barley, or millet bread. In contrast, people of the second highest status alternate their one meal of rice by three meals of bread for two months to be followed by four or five days of bread eating, in between which they have one meal of rice. For the rest of the people in the village it is only during the big festivals that they can eat rice, except, of course, for the able-bodied *kamsel* ploughmen who are given a good meal of rice by the *chokha* each morning on ploughing days.

While these criteria do not tell us very much about the amount of land owned, they do indicate the *gyula* ownership status which is the prime indicator of the relative economic standing of a household in the community.

Based on this criterion of status ranking, the distribution of the forty-two households included in the sample in terms of their land ownership status, land cultivation, leasing-out and leasing-in, are given in the following table (Tables 2,3, and 4). The tables are given separately for each category of land and a cumulative table has been included at the end.

In the first of the preceding tables on the distribution of *gyula* based on class categories, it is to be noted that the ownership of the *gyula* or the paddy land is disproportionately distributed among the three class categories. Whereas, the class A category represents only 17.3 per cent of the population, it owns 47 per cent of the land and operates 38.3 per cent of it with most of the difference being leased out to *kamsel* labourers who mainly plough for them in *lagitya* or *haligado* relationships. This is evident from the fact that the C class category, which consists mostly of *kamsel* households (19 out of 22 households) and represents 43.9 per cent of the population, owns only 8.4 per cent of the *gyula* and operates 16.6 per cent of it with half of it being leased in from the *chokha lagi*. Except for the small proportion whose usufruct has been given from *lagi* to *lagitya* in-kind payment, most *gyula* land is owner-cultivated, simply because the holdings are very small. The per capita ownership of even the highest category is only 4.5 *muri* (1 *muri* = 0.013 ha), which is less than one-eighteenth of a hectare, and the average per capita ownership for the entire sample is 1.7 *muri* which translates into around a forty-fifth of a hectare.

**Table 2: Distribution of Jyula Based on Class Categories**

| Class categories | No. of households | Population (%) | Jyula (Muri)*   |            |                  |            |           |                    |            |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|------------|
|                  |                   |                | Total owned (%) | Per capita | Owner cultivated | Leased out | Leased in | Total operated (%) | Per capita |
| A                | 6                 | 41<br>(17.3)   | 185<br>(47.0)   | 4.5        | 141.75           | 43.25      | 4         | 145.75<br>(38.3%)  | 3.6        |
| B                | 14                | 92<br>(38.8)   | 176<br>(44.7)   | 1.9        | 166.00           | 10.00      | 5.5       | 171.5<br>(45.1%)   | 1.7        |
| C                | 22                | 104<br>(43.9)  | 33<br>(8.4)     | 0.3        | 31.00            | 2.00       | 32        | 63.00<br>(16.6%)   | 0.6        |
|                  | 42                | 237<br>(100.0) | 394<br>(100.1)  | 1.7        | 338.75           | 55.25      | 41.5      | 380.25<br>(100.0)  | 91.6       |

Source: Field Study

\* Muri = 0.013 ha; 1 ha = 78.6 muri

**Table 3: Distribution of Bhuwa Based on Class Categories**

| Class categories | No. of households | Population (%) | Bhuwa (Ha)*     |            |                  |            |           |                    |            |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|------------|
|                  |                   |                | Total owned (%) | Per capita | Owner cultivated | Leased out | Leased in | Total operated (%) | Per capita |
| A                | 6                 | 41<br>(17.3)   | 32<br>(37.2)    | 0.8        | 31.5             | 0.5        | -         | 31.5<br>(37.1%)    | 0.5        |
| B                | 14                | 92<br>(38.8)   | 33.6<br>(39.0)  | 0.4        | 31.1             | 2.5        | -         | 31.1<br>(36.7%)    | 0.3        |
| C                | 22                | 104<br>(43.9)  | 20.5<br>(23.8)  | 0.2        | 20               | 0.5        | 2.25      | 22.25<br>(26.2%)   | 0.2        |
|                  | 42                | 237<br>(100.0) | 86.1<br>(100)   | 0.4        | 82.6             | 3.5        | 2.25      | 84.85<br>(100.0)   | 0.4        |

Source: Field Study

\* one *hal* = approx. 0.08ha, i.e., 1ha=13.1 *hal*

Table 4: Distribution of Lekali Bhuwa Based on Class Categories

| Class categories | No. of households | Population (%) | Bhuwa (Ha)*     |            |                  |            |           |        |                    | Per capita      |     |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------|-----------|--------|--------------------|-----------------|-----|
|                  |                   |                | Total owned (%) | Per capita | Owner cultivated | Leased out | Leased in | Fallow | Total operated (%) |                 |     |
| A                | 6                 | 41<br>(17.3)   | 51.5<br>(28.2)  | 1.3        | 37               | 12         | 2.5       | 2.5    | 2.5                | 39.5<br>(26.6)  | 1   |
| B                | 14                | 92<br>(38.8)   | 75.5<br>(41.3)  | 0.8        | 67.75            | 4.2        | -         | 3.5    | 3.5                | 67.75<br>(45.6) | 0.7 |
| C                | 22                | 104<br>(43.9)  | 55.7<br>(30.5)  | 0.5        | 40.2             | 12.5       | 1         | 3.0    | 3.0                | 41.2<br>(27.8)  | 0.4 |
|                  | 42                | 237<br>(100)   | 186.7<br>(100)  | 0.8        | 144.95           | 28.7       | 3.5       | 9.0    | 9.0                | 184.45<br>(100) | 0.6 |

Source: Field study

\* one ha = approx. 0.08, i.e., 1 ha = 13.1 ha

As seen in Table No. 3, which gives the distribution of ownership of *bhuwa* or unirrigated village land, here also the per capita distribution is very meagre (0.8 *hal* or one-sixteenth of a hectare for the highest category and 0.4 *hal* or one thirty-third of one ha), and most of this is owner-cultivated. *Bhuwa* land is not popular as payment in-kind to the *lagitya* or *haligado*.

Table 5 shows the distribution of the *lekali bhuwa* and presents a slightly different picture in that the contrast in the proportion of *lekali* owned by different categories is less pronounced, and in that the 43.9 per cent of the people representing the lowest class category own 30.5 per cent of the land. However, in absolute terms, the per capita ownership remains quite meagre at an average of 0.8 *hal* or one-sixteenth of a hectare.

However, two points are worth noting. Firstly, both the highest and lowest categories have leased out 12 and 12.5 *hal* of *lekali* respectively, but for different reasons. In the case of the top category, the *lekali*, which, as stated earlier, could be located at a distance of anywhere up to three hours' climbing distance from the village, have been leased out on a share-cropping basis to *ista* at higher elevations closer to the land because of the shortage of manpower in the owner's household. But, in the case of the latter category, all of the 12.5 *hal* belong to the *Damai* and have been mortgaged to the highland villagers indicating their state of indebtedness. Secondly, a few *hal* have been left fallow or uncultivated for want of sufficient labour in the owner's household, but each one of them has an agenda to work on them in the near future.

The following Table 5 gives a consolidated picture of the total land ownership and land-operating status of the sample households in Diyargaon which allows for some inter-category comparisons in terms of the kind and proportion of land owned and cultivated. Table 5 reveals a few important characteristics of the distribution of agricultural land among different classes of Diyargaon households. While the disproportionate distribution of land among different classes is evident in all categories of land ownership, the contrast, as stated earlier, is increasingly less pronounced with the deterioration in the kind of land. For the local people, *gyula* is the preferred kind of agricultural land followed by *ghaderi bhuwa* or *bhuwa*. *Lekali* is much more demanding in terms of logistics and is, therefore, resorted to only as a source of supplementary produce.

**Table 5: Consolidated Table Showing Total Owned and Total Operated Status of Jyula, Bhuwa, and Lekali Based on Class Categories**

| Class categories | No. of households | Population (%) | Jyula (Muri)          |                       |                       |                |                  | Bhuwa (Muri) <sup>a</sup> |                  |     |                  | Lekali (Muri) <sup>a</sup> |                  |     |                  | Total (Muri) |                  |      |  |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|----------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|--------------|------------------|------|--|
|                  |                   |                | 1 <sup>b</sup><br>(%) | 2 <sup>b</sup><br>(%) | 3 <sup>b</sup><br>(%) | 4 <sup>b</sup> | 1<br>(%)         | 2<br>(%)                  | 3<br>(%)         | 4   | 1<br>(%)         | 2<br>(%)                   | 3<br>(%)         | 4   | 1<br>(%)         | 2            | 3<br>(%)         | 4    |  |
| A                | 6                 | 41<br>(17.3)   | 185<br>(47)           | 4.5                   | 145.75<br>(36.3)      | 3.6            | 192.00<br>(37.2) | 4.8                       | 188.00<br>(37.1) | 4.8 | 309.00<br>(28.2) | 7.8                        | 237.00<br>(26.6) | 6   | 686.00<br>(34.2) | 16.7         | 571.75<br>(32.1) | 13.9 |  |
| B                | 14                | 92<br>(38.8)   | 176<br>(44.7)         | 1.9                   | 171.5<br>(45.1)       | 1.7            | 201.6<br>(39.0)  | 2.4                       | 186.6<br>(36.7)  | 1.8 | 453.00<br>(41.3) | 4.8                        | 406.5<br>(45.6)  | 4.2 | 830.6<br>(41.4)  | 9.0          | 764.6<br>(43.0)  | 8.3  |  |
| C                | 22                | 104<br>(43.9)  | 33<br>(8.4)           | 0.3                   | 63.0<br>(16.6)        | 0.6            | 123.0<br>(23.8)  | 1.2                       | 133.5<br>(26.2)  | 1.2 | 334.2<br>(30.5)  | 3                          | 247.2<br>(27.8)  | 2.4 | 490.2<br>(24.4)  | 4.7          | 443.7<br>(24.9)  | 4.3  |  |
|                  | 42                | 237<br>(100)   | 304<br>(100.1)        | 1.7                   | 380.25<br>(100)       | 1.6            | 516.6<br>(100)   | 2.4                       | 509.1<br>(100)   | 2.4 | 1096.2<br>(100)  | 4.8                        | 860.7<br>(100)   | 3.6 | 2006.8<br>(100)  | 8.5          | 1790.05<br>(100) | 7.5  |  |

a) *hal* converted into *muri* by multiplying *hal* by 6 based on the local reckoning that a pair of bullocks can plough in a day one *ropani*, i.e., 4 *muri* of *Jyula* or one *hal* of *Bhuwa*, the soil in the latter being 1.5 times softer to plough than the compacted soil of the former.

b) 1 = Total owned; 2 = per capita of 1; 3 = Total operated; 4 = per capita of 3.

Source: Tables 2-4.

It is said that people do not cultivate *lekali* any more than they really need to, and this does seem to be borne out by the relative proportion of different kinds of land held by different classes of people. For instance, whereas class A households own 47 per cent of all *gyula*, the proportion is 37.2 per cent in the case of *bhuwa*, and only 28.2 per cent for *lekali*. In contrast, however, class C households, which represent 43.9 per cent of the sample population, own only 8.4 per cent of the *gyula*, and the proportion jumps to 23.8 per cent in the case of *bhuwa* and to 30.5 per cent in the case of *lekali*. From this point of view, although the per capita distribution of *lekali* ownership too remains highly skewed in favour of the class A households (7.8 *muri* per capita as against 3 *muri* per capita for class C), nonetheless, this category of land does seem to provide considerable respite to the poorest households in the community.

Although *lekali* seems to be poor man's land in Diyargaon, it is not quite so. Even after all categories of land are put together, the per capita ownership of class C households is a meagre 4.7 *muri* which is almost one-seventeenth of a hectare. Even the highest category is far less impressive when their holdings are calculated in terms of hectares; the per capita ownership of 16.7 *muri*, after all, is not more than one-fifth of a hectare and less than the national per capita cultivated land of 0.24 ha in 1990 (World Bank 1990: 23).

Furthermore, Table 6 further shows that dependence on *lekali* is as pronounced also for the higher caste people in the village. The two higher castes, which together represent 46.4 per cent of the sample population, have holdings of which 50.8 per cent consist of *lekali* land. This, however, is even more aggravated in the case of the *kamsel* who have 63.5 per cent of their holdings on *lekali*.

Another interesting point to note in Table 5 is that there is also a high degree of intra-high caste difference in the ownership of land. While the per capita *gyula* holding of the members of the *Bahun bado* is 3.8 *muri*, that of the *Jachauri* is only 2.1 *muri*. The contrast is similar in the case of *bhuwa* also, with 4.1 *muri* per capita for the *Bahun bado* and 2.1 for *Jachauri*. However, the *Jachauri* villagers have a per capita *lekali* of 8.0 *muri* in contrast to that of 5.2 for the *Bahun bado*.

Table 6: Owned and Operated Land Based on Caste Division as Reflected by the Bado

| Castes                                   | No. of HHD | Popul-ation   | Jyula (Muri)   |                |                  |                | Bhuwa (Muri) <sup>5</sup> |     |                 |     | Lekhali (Muri) <sup>a</sup> |     |                 |     | Total            |      |                    |      |
|--|------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|------------------|------|--------------------|------|
|  |            |               | 1 <sup>b</sup> | 2 <sup>b</sup> | 3 <sup>b</sup>   | 4 <sup>b</sup> | 1                         | 2   | 3               | 4   | 1                           | 2   | 3               | 4   | 1                | 2    | 3                  | 4    |
| <b>Higher Caste</b><br><i>Bahun Bado</i> | 10         | 61            | 230            | 3.8            | 189.5            | 3.1            | 249                       | 4.1 | 234             | 3.8 | 315                         | 5.2 | 268.5           | 4.4 | 794              | 13   | 692                | 11.3 |
| Jachauri<br><i>Bado</i>                  | 8          | 49            | 103            | 2.1            | 97.75            | 2.0            | 105                       | 2.1 | 102             | 2.1 | 393                         | 8.0 | 315             | 6.4 | 601              | 12.3 | 514.75             | 10.5 |
| Sub Total (%)                            | 18         | 110<br>(46.4) | 333<br>(23.9)  | 3.0            | 287.25<br>(23.8) | 2.6            | 354<br>(25.4)             | 3.2 | 336<br>(27.8)   | 3.1 | 708<br>(50.8)               | 6.4 | 583.5<br>(48.4) | 5.3 | 1395<br>(100.1)  | 12.7 | 1206.75<br>(100)   | 11.0 |
| <i>karnsel Kami</i>                      | 9          | 52            | 47.5           | 0.9            | 54               | 1.0            | 69.6                      | 1.3 | 69.6            | 1.3 | 171                         | 3.3 | 162.0           | 3.1 | 288.1            | 5.5  | 285.6              | 5.5  |
| <i>Damai</i>                             | 6          | 30            | 9.7            | 0.3            | 9                | 0.3            | 61.5                      | 2.0 | 58.5            | 1.9 | 159                         | 5.3 | 81.0            | 2.7 | 230              | 7.7  | 148.5              | 4.9  |
| <i>Sarki</i>                             | 9          | 45            | 4.0            | 0.1            | 19               | 0.4            | 31.5                      | 0.7 | 45.0            | 1.0 | 58.5                        | 1.3 | 64.5            | 1.4 | 94               | 2.1  | 128.5              | 2.9  |
| Sub Total (%)                            | 24         | 127<br>(53.6) | 61<br>(10)     | 0.5            | 82<br>(14.6)     | 0.6            | 162.6<br>(26.6)           | 1.3 | 137.1<br>(30.8) | 1.4 | 388.5<br>(63.5)             | 3.1 | 307.5<br>(54.7) | 2.4 | 612.1<br>(100.1) | 4.8  | 562.6<br>(100.1)   | 4.4  |
| Total                                    | 42         | 237<br>(100)  | 394<br>(19.6)  | 1.7            | 369.25<br>(20.9) | 1.6            | 516.6<br>(25.7)           | 2.2 | 509.1<br>(28.8) | 2.1 | 1096.5<br>(54.6)            | 4.6 | 891<br>(50.4)   | 3.8 | 2007.1<br>(99.9) | 8.5  | 1769.35<br>(100.1) | 7.5  |

a) Bhuwa and Lekhali multiplied by 6 to convert it into as in Table 5.

b) 1 = Total owned; 2 = per capita; 3 = Total operated; 4 = Per capita.

Source: Field data.

Similarly, in the case of the *kamsel*, the intra-*kamsel* difference in ownership is immense. The *Kami*, by far the most "prosperous" of the *kamsel*, have a per capita *jyula* ownership of 0.9 *muri* in contrast to the 0.1 of the *Sarki*, the poorest. This difference between the two groups also holds in the case of total per capita land owned as well as total per capita land operated, which amounts to 5.5 *muri* and 2.1 *muri* and 5.5 *muri* and 2.9 *muri* respectively. In the case of the *Damai*, however, total land owned per capita is higher than the other two groups with 7.7 *muri* (mostly accounted for by ownership of *lekali* which is 5.3 *muri* per capita), but their total operated holdings are only 4.9 *muri* per capita because of the extensive mortgaging and the resultant alienation of the usufruct of their *lekali* land.

### Ownership Changes Between 1970 to 1990

Table 7 provides some insight into the changes that have taken place in the twenty years between 1970 and 1990 among the *chokha* population of *Bahun* and *Jachauri bado*. The data for 1970 comes from the *Thakuri* sample (21 households, cluster sample) from the *Bahun* and *Jachauri bado* in the previous study (Shrestha 1971) and are compared with 18 households of the same *bado* included in the sample of the present study. The table shows, firstly, some upward mobility in the population with only 12.7 per cent in the C category instead of 23.5 per cent as in the previous sample. Secondly, the ownership of all kinds of agricultural land has increased between 1970 to 1990. The average per capita ownership has gone up for *jyula* from 2.8 *muri* to 3.0 *muri*, for *bhuwa* from 1.6 to 3.2 *muri*, and for *lekali* from 4.0 to 6.4 *muri* and the total per capita holdings have risen from 8.4 *muri* in 1970 to 12.7 *muri* in 1990.

In the case of *jyula* ownership of class A households also, the decline from 5.9 to 4.5 is more apparent than real, because, in the previous sample, the A category included one household that owned 148 *muri* of *jyula*, which represented more than 64 per cent of the then total *jyula* land (230.5 *muri*). While that particular household too has increased its ownership of *jyula* in the last two decades, the present sample includes only a small portion of its landholding, including *jyula* that belongs to a section of the joint family which now lives separately from that household during the year. The comparison, thus, excludes the major portion of the original estate. Given this context, even *jyula* ownership has, indeed, increased.

**Table 7: Comparison of Land Ownership between 1970 and 1990 among the Sample Population of the Jachauri and Bahun Bado**

| Class category | No. of Households |      | Population   |              | Jyula (Mun)               |     |                           | Bhuva (Mun) |                          |      | Lekhali (Mun)*          |     |                          | Total |                          |      |                          |      |                          |      |
|----------------|-------------------|------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
|                | 1970              | 1990 | 1970         | 1990         | 1970                      | p/c | 1990                      | 1970        | p/c                      | 1990 | 1970                    | p/c | 1990                     | 1970  | p/c                      | 1990 | p/c                      |      |                          |      |
| A (%)          | 4                 | 6    | 39<br>(33.9) | 41<br>(37.3) | 230.5<br>(70.2)<br>(42.0) | 5.9 | 185<br>(55.6)<br>(27.0)   | 4.5         | 120<br>(66.1)<br>(21.9)  | 3.1  | 192<br>(54.2)<br>(28.0) | 4.8 | 198<br>(43.1)<br>(36.1)  | 5.1   | 309<br>(43.6)<br>(45.0)  | 7.5  | 548.5<br>(56.6)<br>(100) | 14.1 | 686<br>(49.2)<br>(100)   | 16.7 |
| B (%)          | 10                | 9    | 49<br>(42.6) | 55<br>(50.0) | 79.5<br>(24.2)<br>(25.5)  | 1.6 | 143.5<br>(43.1)<br>(22.9) | 2.6         | 55.5<br>(30.8)<br>(17.8) | 1.1  | 156<br>(44.1)<br>(24.9) | 2.8 | 177<br>(38.6)<br>(56.7)  | 3.6   | 327<br>(46.2)<br>(52.2)  | 5.9  | 312.5<br>(32.2)<br>(100) | 6.4  | 626.5<br>(44.9)<br>(100) | 11.4 |
| C (%)          | 7                 | 3    | 27<br>(23.5) | 14<br>(12.7) | 19.5<br>(5.6)<br>(17.1)   | 0.7 | 4.5<br>(1.4)<br>(5.5)     | 0.3         | 6.0<br>(3.3)<br>(5.5)    | 0.2  | 6.0<br>(1.7)<br>(7.3)   | 0.4 | 84.0<br>(18.3)<br>(77.4) | 3.1   | 72.0<br>(10.2)<br>(87.3) | 5.1  | 108.5<br>(11.2)<br>(100) | 4.0  | 82.5<br>(5.9)<br>(100.1) | 5.9  |
| Total          | 21                | 18   | 115<br>(100) | 110<br>(110) | 328.5<br>(100)<br>(33.9)  | 2.8 | 333<br>(100.1)<br>(23.9)  | 3.0         | 181.5<br>(100)<br>(18.7) | 1.6  | 354<br>(100)<br>(25.4)  | 3.2 | 459<br>(100)<br>(50.8)   | 4.0   | 708<br>(100)<br>(50.8)   | 6.4  | 969<br>(100)<br>(100)    | 8.4  | 1395<br>(100)<br>(100.1) | 12.7 |

Sources: Shrestha 1971: 29; Field Study.

\* Bhuva and Lekhali ha/ measures converted into mun by multiplying them by six as in Table 5.

One more striking aspect in this change, however, is that despite the all-round increment recorded in the ownership of land, the inter-class differences have persisted. The members of B group only have, however, recorded proportionately larger increments than their more and less fortunate neighbours. The per capita ownership for all kinds of land for them has increased from 6.4 *muri* to 11.4 *muri*, an increment of 78 per cent in the last two decades.

### **Some Important Factors in the Dynamics of Land Distribution**

The history of agriculture here, particularly that of land distribution, has all along been a dynamic process conditioned both by tradition and by the need to respond to the forces of change. The fact that the agricultural land distribution among different caste groups has been uneven and skewed has its roots in manifold aspects of the historical processes. For instance, the *Thakuri* of the Jachauri *bado* traditionally enjoyed the status of being royal descendants of the Jalandhar kings and shunned agriculture and agricultural land as being too menial and relied more on taxes and tributes. However, subsequent State interventions alienated them from this privilege. The Jachauri *Thakuri* today are not known for having large estates.

In contrast, the *Bahun* immigrants from Dailekh came here several generations ago fully prepared for agriculture, along with the *Kami* ploughmen who accompanied them, to benefit from what Barry Bishop called the *Brahman-Thakuri* consortium mentioned earlier.

The *kamsel* on the other hand were traditionally inspired and guided by the Varna philosophy of Hinduism which defined their role as rendering service to their twice-born masters in return for the latter's taking care of all their material needs. The *Damai* did not plough, played music, and stitched clothes and were by tradition assigned the menial role of being receivers of largesse from their masters. Hence the difference in the land ownership status between *kamsel* groups. While the tradition of showering bounty or taking care of their needs tapered off long ago, the *kamsel* never had any power nor the will to seek access to agricultural lands of their own and, therefore, today suffer under this legacy of orthodox Hinduism.

Based on archeological finds of the remains of terracing and dwelling structures at higher altitudes, it is further believed that expansion of

the population and the resultant inroads into highland farming alternated with Malthusian interventions and abandonment of those farms. Most people know about the decline in population from the cholera epidemic of 1975 B.S. (1981 A.D.) and the consequent reverting to nature of their once cultivated land. But, with the subsequent increase in population, the highland farms were again visited, initially for potatoes and pasture, but gradually leading to an expansion of farming activities, which were intensified during the three-year long drought from 1965 to 1968 A.D.

In Diyargaon the population continues to increase, and with it the need for expanding holdings which becomes progressively less possible in the vicinity of the village and, therefore, has to be undertaken more and more in the *lekali* context. Since paddy is an export crop and, therefore, a cash earner, the emphasis on *jjula* land acquisition is immense. With increasing irrigation facilities, *bhuwa* land, wherever possible, is converted into *jjula*, and this resultant shortfall in *bhuwa* and the crops thereof is made up by expanding holdings in the highlands. Thus, the *lekali* today bear the entire brunt, felling of trees and clearing of forestland are now common sights in the farther reaches of Diyargaon.

However, it is still far from being a free-for-all. The only outcome of the land reform introduced here 24 years ago was that all landowners had to declare the extent of their ownership, including that of *lekali* lands. The villagers, in turn, included in this statement as wide a perimeter as possible, whether cultivated or under forest, at that time. Thus, all cultivable forest land has a titled owner. Undeclared forest land can be tampered with only with the connivance of government officials, and only very few in the village have the necessary skill, influence, and resources to accomplish that. The limits to the extension of holdings, therefore, are approaching rather rapidly.

Today keen competition for land is one of the facts of life in which the poor are yielding their place to the rich. There are no holds barred: e.g., outright purchase, mortgage, deceit, short-changing, eviction, or even appropriation of government land with the collusion of revenue officials. While there are some sixteen households without any *jjula* ownership - an indication of the state of being destitute - three families dominate the village landholding scene. It is said that, of the entire *jjula* lands held by the villagers, three families alone are in possession of 40 per cent of them and that land also happens to be some of the

best in quality in the whole village. Prices of *gyula* land have gone up (Rs 10,000/*muri* on the average), thus effectively precluding the less fortunate competitors. A few builder *Kami* are an exception and are buying some land from *chokha* in the village or elsewhere from the money they made building new houses in the area. While it has been only a sporadic phenomenon, it has certainly unleashed an outcry among the *chokha* in the village that times are bad and that *dum*<sup>2</sup> are turning into *chokha* and *chokha* into *dum*.

With a large number of sons in the family, a rich man's penchant for more land becomes even more intensified in his bid to make their future as secure as possible. With increasingly limited possibilities for substantial expansion of holdings in the village, the arena for this competition has since shifted to the *lekali* lands in recent times. With little room left for forest lands to be brought under the plough, the *lekali* lands are now bought and sold.

There are already a number of families for whom the *lekali* lands represent their entire year's supply of food. It has only been the lack of a drinking water source anywhere near their highland farms that has continued to keep them in Diyargaon. Otherwise, a new settlement would have come up in the highlands long ago. And some of the villagers are seriously working to get some government assistance for the supply of drinking water there.

However, as ruthless as the competition may be, there are some lands that they keep protected as grasslands in the vicinity of the village. Much of the fodder supply during the winter months comes from them. Some areas of land, such as the one on the ridge immediately above the village, are protected not only for the grass but also to prevent the possible onslaught of muddy water gushing down to the village during monsoon. Although the land-hungry *Kami* have been desperately after this fallow land, located so attractively near the village (and they could not care less about what happens to their *chokha* neighbours), the rich and the powerful in the village have so far succeeded in holding them in abeyance.

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<sup>2</sup> a more derogatory term than *kamsel*.

## Crop Production

Agriculture in Jumla, as it is practised today, has been the result of a continuous process of evolution over the centuries, and this has been characterised by selective adaptation in the context of its geographical, topographical, and climatic specificities. As mentioned earlier, given the rigour imposed by natural conditions, some practices are highly unique to the region, and the entire range of human activities, organisation, and movements is orchestrated to meet their specific requirements and to attain a most efficient and impressive performance in the face of these highly constraining limitations.

### *Crops and Their Rotation*

Paddy is the most valuable of all crops as it is the most desired staple, the highest yielding, a cash earner as an export commodity, and an important status symbol, while other major crops in order of importance are barley, wheat, finger-millet, potatoes, beans, and maize. Other crops grown are common millet (*chino*), Italian millet (*kaguno*), soyabeans, gourd, and radishes. Buckwheat (*phapar*) is also grown but in increasingly limited quantities because of the extended restrictions imposed by the Forest Department and the nearby Rara Wild Life Sanctuary on the slashing and burning of the forest which is preferable for this crop. Table 8 gives an overview of the calendar and variety of crops grown on different kinds of land cultivated by the people.

Given the paucity of agricultural land, on the one hand, and its diversity, on the other, the cultivation of the wide variety of crops is the result of an orchestra perfected over centuries. Of the three kinds of *gyula* land in the village, namely, *chyute*, *seem*, and *jawad*, only one crop of paddy is grown in the first two, for reasons explained earlier, and is transplanted by the 7th or 8th of *Jestha* which ensures its ripening by harvest time in early *Kartik*.

In *jawad*, cultivation of paddy closely follows that of barley, which is harvested around the middle of *Jestha*, and people pray for overcast skies at night during September and October to ensure the ripening of the paddy crop. Manuring and ploughing follow instantly in order to sow barley by the 1st to the 10th of *Mangsir*.

**Table 8: Annual Calendar of Major Crops on Different Kinds of Diyargaon Land**

| Type of land | Major crops   | Baisakh | Jestha  | Ashar         | Shrawan        | Bhadra | Aswin       | Karik  | Mangsir | Poush | Magh | Fagun | Chaitra |
|--------------|---------------|---------|---------|---------------|----------------|--------|-------------|--------|---------|-------|------|-------|---------|
| Jyula        | Paddy         |         | P<br>P  | W1<br>W1      | W2<br>W2       |        |             | H<br>H |         |       |      |       |         |
|              | Barley        |         | H       |               |                |        |             |        | P       |       |      |       |         |
|              | Finger-millet | P       |         | W1<br>P<br>H  | W2<br>W1       | W2     | H<br>H      |        | P       |       |      |       |         |
|              | Wheat         |         |         |               |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       |         |
| Chaderi      | Barley        |         | H       |               |                |        |             |        | P       |       |      |       |         |
|              | Wheat         |         |         | H             |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       |         |
|              | Finger-millet | P       | W1<br>P | W2<br>W1<br>P | W3<br>W2<br>W1 | W2     | H<br>H<br>H |        | P<br>P  |       |      |       |         |
|              | Bears         |         | P       | P<br>P        | W1<br>W1       |        |             | H<br>H |         |       |      |       |         |
|              | Common Millet |         | P       | W1<br>P       | W2<br>W1       | W2     | H<br>H      |        |         |       |      |       |         |
|              |               |         |         |               |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       |         |
| Lekali       | Barley        |         |         | H             |                |        |             |        | P       |       |      |       | P       |
|              | Wheat         |         |         | H             |                |        |             |        | P       |       |      |       | P       |
|              | Maize         |         |         | W2            |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       | P       |
|              | Potatoes      |         |         |               |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       | P       |
| Bears        |               | W1      |         |               |                |        |             | H<br>H |         |       |      |       |         |
|              |               |         |         |               |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       |         |
| Buck-wheat   |               |         | P       |               |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       |         |
|              |               |         |         |               |                |        |             |        |         |       |      |       |         |

P = Planting; W1 = First Weeding; W2 = Second Weeding; W3 = Third Weeding; H = Harvest

Note: The location of the abbreviation in the columns indicate the approximate time in the month when the task is undertaken.

While people greatly prefer wheat to barley, it does not mature by 12th to 20th *Jestha* to allow for the paddy crop to follow. Therefore, wheat is separately planted on *jawad* in *Kartik* and is harvested in *Ashar* and finger millet seedlings are transplanted soon afterwards.

The decision as to the combination of crops grown on different plots of land is governed by two considerations. The first is the household's need for different kinds of foodgrain. For example, if the household is short on *ghaderi* land, the need for finger millet forces it to allocate some *gyula* land for it rather than for paddy.

Secondly, any given plot has to go through a cycle of different crops in the interest of its fertility. For example, it is believed that once finger millet is grown on *gyula*, there will be less weeds in the ensuing paddy crop.

#### *Forced Germination of Paddy Seeds*

Since agriculture, especially with regard to paddy, seeks to maximise the utilisation of a limited number of warm days, forced germination of paddy seeds has traditionally been a part of the local agricultural technology. A rather strongly held local belief has it that if a villager does not return from his winter migration on or before the 12th of *Chaitra*, his last rites may as well be performed because he certainly must be dead since he could not make it to plant paddy. It is very important that the villagers begin their paddy seed preparation on that day by putting them in a sack which is left in the river to soak for four days.

On the 16th of *Chaitra*, the seeds are spread out and left to dry in the sun for three hours on a woollen blanket. The seeds are then spread out on the pre-heated kitchen floor in the warmest compartment of the house. The seeds are covered with small pine branches or birch leaves. Ten or twelve layers of clothes are then spread over them on which people sleep for two days to provide extra heat. Every morning water is sprinkled over the seeds. Because of the steam that builds up inside, the seeds germinate during the two days, and people refrain from sleeping on them at this stage.

After two more days on the kitchen floor, on the 20th of *Chaitra*, the germinated seeds are taken to the specially prepared seedbed, called *bennu*, located in the middle of the village and are evenly broadcast on it so that the seeds land the right end up.

### *Ghaderi Crops*

In *ghaderi bhawa*, or commonly only *ghaderi*, the post-winter agricultural season begins in *Chaitra* with the ploughing of the land that has been left fallow since last *Kartik* for millet to be sown in *Baisakh*.

The rest of the *ghaderi* would have barley and wheat crops on them which were sown in *Mangsir* and harvested in the months of *Jestha* and *Ashar* respectively. Barley is followed by common millet or beans or finger millet in *Jestha* and wheat is followed by common millet, finger millet, or beans in *Ashar*.

While millet needs weeding three times during the months of *Baisakh*, *Jestha*, and *Ashar*, common millet requires two weedings and beans only one. Finger millet and common millet are harvested in the month of *Aswin* and beans in *Kartik*.

As stated earlier, the choice of crops is governed by the food needs of individual households (for example, in the case of the choice between planting millet or beans or common millet in *Jestha*), and each plot of *ghaderi*, like *gyula*, goes through a well-calculated pattern of crop rotation. Where the land has been left fallow for sowing finger millet in *Baisakh*, its harvest in *Aswin* is followed by the sowing of barley or wheat in *Mangsir*, which, in turn, is harvested in *Jestha* or *Ashar*, as stated above, to be followed by beans. Following the bean harvest in *Kartik*, the land is kept fallow for almost six months and finger millet is planted again in *Baisakh*. Since wheat is known to severely deplete the fertility of the soil, it is necessarily followed by the cultivation of beans which have nitrogen-fixing properties.

However, if, after planting wheat, snowfall is delayed, its ripening is prolonged to the same extent making it too late to plant beans which then makes it necessary for the land to be left fallow for finger millet in *Baisakh*.

## *Lekali Crops*

On the *lekali* lands the entire range of *ghaderi* crops plus maize and potatoes are grown, but the timings are different because of the longer time they take to ripen at that altitude. Here maize, potatoes, and beans are planted in the month of *Chaitra* and generally harvested in the month of *Kartik* involving a period of seven months. But where beans follow wheat, they are planted in *Ashar* and harvested in *Kartik* too.

Similarly, barley and wheat are sown in the month of *Aswin* and are harvested after ten months (in *Ashar*). On the lands close to the *lekali* home, where better fertilisation is possible because of the stationing of the cattle, beans, potatoes, and vegetable crops, such as pumpkins and radishes, are grown. Cultivation of potatoes and maize is followed by wheat which benefits from the resulting looseness of the soil.

Furthermore, where the land is not very fertile, a three-year cycle of crop rotation, based on one crop year of barley followed by another crop year of potatoes and, lastly, by a third crop year of beans, is also observed. Lands in a worse condition are used for a year of one crop followed by another year of fallow.

However, there are a number of household-specific variables that govern the pattern of crop rotation, including the decision to leave a plot of land fallow. If a household can provide sufficient manure, or has a meagre holding, or is sufficiently industrious, it tends to go in for farming the *lekali* lands every year, whereas others can afford the luxury of leaving it fallow.

### *Crop Protection*

Since the months of *Chaitra* and *Baisakh* are lean months, the community employs two able-bodied men in the village to protect the barley crop from possible trespassers, e.g., women who enter the fields for the purpose of cutting grass. If possible, they also pluck the just ripening barley grains, dehusk it by rubbing it between their palms, and eat it with salt which they smuggle in with them. So two watchmen called *narala* keep roaming around the fields and are paid at the rate of four *mana* (2.2 litres) from every landowner, irrespective of the size of his holdings.

The evolution of agricultural technology in Jumla over the centuries has resulted in its sharp fine-tuning to the region's climatic and topographical specificities. Thus the individual's choices of crops and crop rotation are governed by a number of considerations, such as altitude, aspect, slope, irrigation possibilities, distance, manuring possibilities, labour availability, and qualities of different agricultural fields. Village farmlands, particularly paddy land, receive extremely high doses of farmyard manure made from dried pine needles or a special grass called *pire*, both of which are used as bedding for cattle. One source in the government agricultural office in Jumla estimates that one hectare of paddy field receives around 24 tonnes of the fertiliser, far in excess of the required 12 to 14 tonnes. In Diyargaon, one *muri* of *gyula* normally receives some 20 *doko* of manure for paddy which, with an estimate of 25kg per *doko*, amounts to about 40 MT per hectare.

While production is often erratic, conditioned by such factors as rainfall, snowfall, frost, hail, pests, diseases, and wild animals, the productivity of some crops in Diyargaon is generally very high. It is estimated that one *muri* of paddy land (1ha = 78.6 *muri*) generally yields between four-fifths of a quintal to one quintal of paddy, which amounts to a yield level of 6.3 to 7.9MT per hectare. This is several times more than the national average of 2.41 MT in 1990/91 (Ministry of Finance 1991:31). Bishop too has made a high estimate of paddy yields (in the range of 750 to 8,750kg per hectare for the Karnali Zone as a whole [Bishop 1990: 236]). Table 9 gives a comparative picture of the yield rates for major crops in the village, the Karnali Zone, and the country.

The productivity of crops is generally quite erratic, especially on the *lekali* lands, and the occasional ravagings of wild animals like bears, monkeys, and wild boars make the situation worse. However, on the *gyula* land in the village, to which maximum care is given in terms of manuring and irrigation, the yield levels for all the crops, namely, paddy, barley, finger-millet, and wheat, remain extraordinarily high.

### Food Sufficiency, Borrowing, Purchase, and Export

The skewed distribution of agricultural land has a direct bearing on the food sufficiency and export potential of individual households in

the village. The food sufficiency status of the 42 sample households is as follows (Table 10).

**Table 9: Comparative Yield Rates of Important Food Crops (MT/ha)**

| Food Crops    | Diyargaon <sup>a</sup> |                |                | Karnali Zone <sup>b</sup> |              | National Average (1990/91) <sup>c</sup> |
|---------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------|---|
|               | <i>Jyula</i>           | <i>Ghaderi</i> | <i>Lekhali</i> | Range (kg)                | Average (kg) |   |
| Paddy         | 7.1                    | -              | -              | 750-8750                  | 2120         | 2.41                                    |
| Barley        | 3.9                    | 2.6            | 2.6            | 200-4350                  | 1450         | 0.94                                    |
| Wheat         | -                      | 0.9            | 0.4            | 320-5600                  | 1730         | 1.41                                    |
| Maize         | -                      | -              | 0.7            | 190-2940                  | 1170         | 1.62                                    |
| Finger millet | 7.8                    | 1.3            | 0.9            | 260-5600                  | 2050         | 1.17                                    |
| Common millet | -                      | 0.6            | 0.3            | 150-4480                  | 990          | NA                                      |
| Beans         | -                      | 1.3            | 1.3            | 70-2210                   | 700          | NA                                      |
| Potatoes      | -                      | -              | 3.9            | 150-4600                  | 1190         | 8.76                                    |
| Buckwheat     | -                      | -              | 1.3            | -                         | -            | NA                                      |

Source: a) Field data  
 b) Bishop 1990: 236 (the data were for 1970)  
 c) Ministry of Agriculture data for the year.

**Table 10: Sufficiency of Household Food Production in Terms of the Number of Months**

| <i>Bado</i>     | 12 months or more | Over 6 months | Less than 6 months | Total no. of households in sample |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Bahun</i>    | 7                 | 3             | -                  | 10                                |
| <i>Jachauri</i> | 4                 | 2             | 2                  | 8                                 |
| <i>Kami</i>     | 1                 | 3             | 5                  | 9                                 |
| <i>Damai</i>    | -                 | 6             | -                  | 6                                 |
| <i>Sarki</i>    | -                 | 4             | 5                  | 9                                 |
| Total           | 12                | 18            | 12                 | 42                                |

Source: Field Study

Of the 42 households only about a fourth of them produce sufficiently for the year round. Most households have to supplement their production from other sources, namely, by buying, borrowing, through migration, or a combination thereof.

While the paddy crop is either personally consumed or exported out of the village through *Mugali* traders (i.e., traders from the Mugu village in Mugu district) for sale in Nepal or export to Tibet, most grains locally bought or borrowed are barley, millet, maize, or buckwheat.

Cash incomes for buying foodgrains come mostly from trading or external employment. Occupational caste households also derive cash incomes from their specialisation, e.g., the *Kami* profession of house-building and manufacturing wooden storage bins, or the *Sarki* occupation of levelling the rainfed *ghaderi* land into *gyula* etc.

Most occupational caste households are also the beneficiaries of additional supplies from the grain payments that they traditionally and regularly receive from their *lagi* households after the winter and summer harvests. As stated earlier, each *chokha* household maintains at least one *Kami*, one *Sarki*, one *Damai*, and one *Sunar* household as their *lagitya*, and the men and women members of these groups render occupational service and a few days of labour during each agricultural operation to the former. In return, they receive seasonal payments, the quantity of which depends on the size of the *lagi* landholding and its labour requirements.

Additionally, in order to help meet the continuing gap in their supplies, most *kamsel* households also resort to distress borrowing of small quantities of foodgrains from a number of *chokha* households, mostly during the four lean months from January to April, as advance wage payments for the labour that they would render them during the next planting season in May-June. It is said that men from such households are physically torn apart at the hands of the *chokha* lenders who compete to lay claim to their labour to meet urgent labour needs during paddy transplantation. Poor *chokha* households in the village also borrow foodgrains during the lean months but manage to pay back in-kind. They too contribute labour as "help" to the lenders.

Export of foodgrain takes place through outright sale for cash by eleven households in the village (five are included in the sample). Further, these households and many more also export grain through

barter in exchange for necessary articles like woollen shawls, red pepper, or salt that the *Mugali* regularly bring to the village. While paddy, rice, or common millet are used for barter or sale to the *Mugali*, other foodgrains, also exported from the village, are barley, finger millet, and maize.

In order to alleviate the seasonal food shortage for the poor, a local leader persuaded the Nepal Food Corporation Office in Jumla to open a depot in Diyargaon in 1986/87 to locally procure foodgrains after the harvest and sell them to the poor during the lean months of March and April. The first year, only 14 quintals were purchased. The following year, the purchase increased to 78 quintals. But approval from higher authorities to release the paddy came only in September. By that time the poor had access to other foodgrains and it was no longer necessary that year. So it was later sold to the *Mugali* for export.

By the third year, the buying and selling responsibility was given to the local Cooperative Society. By that time the local people had figured out a method of benefitting from this facility. Individuals who sold the paddy to it did so in marked sacks and used the cash to engage in seasonal trading during winter. Upon their return in March-April they bought the same sacks back again. Thus, the system, instead of providing relief to the poor, degenerated into a kind of banking operation for the more fortunate in the village.

In 1989, no grain was sold to the cooperative, because the local traders did not need any cash for trade as a result of the Indian embargo against the movement of people and goods across their border with Nepal.

While the programme is no longer operational, the only contribution it made to the place was the introduction of the metric system of kilogrammes and quintals to the area, which the local people accepted after some persuasion.

The depot, though short-lived in the village, showed that paddy export from the village has been tied to the resilience of the traditional channels of barter and sale with the *Mugali* of the north. They provided a set of services that the depot or the cooperative obviously could not, including sale on credit. Even when cash sales were made to the *Mugali*, it was a transaction based on the long-standing

institution of *ista* affinity in which the considerations of comparative gain and loss were not compromised by the cordiality involved in the relationship.

In 1990, there was a scarcity of foodgrains in the district headquarters, because of the suspension of the heavily subsidised foodgrain supplies flown in from Nepalganj at a cost of Rs 33/Kg for transportation alone (as against the total price of Rs 34/kg paid for Sinja rice). Although the flight was later partially resumed, the Sinja Valley, including Diyar-gaon, always reputed as an important granary in the Karnali Zone, became a major supplier and the *Mugali* remained a major conduit.

To summarise, it should be noted that, whereas the per capita holding of cultivated land is very low, its ill effects are partially offset by the extreme care and diligence with which the people apply themselves to agriculture in order to achieve one of the highest productivity rates in the country. The existing export potential, coupled with the foodgrain savings resulting from seasonal exodus and limited food intake by the numerous poor people in the village, is the result of this industriousness.

#### *Innovations, Constraints, and Priorities*

Although the government agricultural centre in Jumla was established more than 20 years ago (1970), its contribution to the improvement of local agriculture is negligible. Although it undertakes trial tests for seeds and methods developed elsewhere, these attempts suffer from their incapacity to meet the highly specific requirements of agriculture in Jumla where temperature remains the single greatest limiting factor. Given the successful evolution of traditional agriculture in Jumla, its productivity levels are far more than those of the varieties intended for extension by the centre.

As stated earlier, the local paddy in the Sinja Valley has a productivity level which is far in excess of the reported yield rate of the *Rodini* variety of paddy (three mt/ha) released by the centre.

Similar has been the experience with the so-called improved wheat. While the villagers would prefer to grow wheat in place of barley on *yyula* land, the "improved" variety - e.g., RR21 in the past - has not been suitable for cultivation even on unirrigated land, because it matures late and does not leave enough time for the bean crop to

follow. (Beans must ripen before the onset of frost in *Kartik*). "Development" potatoes too were rejected outright because they were not thought to be tasty.

While insecticides have not been made available, whichever heavily-subsidised chemical fertilisers (particularly urea) are available are used for paddy. However, application has decreased drastically in recent times because it severely affects the yield of the ensuing barley crop.

Agricultural implements continue to remain traditional. The only change in the last two decades has been the substitution of brittle wooden plough tips (traditionally provided to the villagers in bunches by their highland *Khasa* neighbours and by *ista*) by iron tips which a blacksmith in a neighbouring village manufactures for them from iron brought all the way from Nepalganj and India.

The villagers also ridicule the other practices promoted by the government's agricultural extension office. Whereas the latter advocates the merits of making farmyard manure in a pit and turning it over and over again until it has fully composted, its feasibility is questioned altogether when fertiliser needs exceed hundreds and hundreds of *doko* (*doko* = 25 kg approx.) of compost.

Similarly, the villagers are also instructed in seed selection, but they have very little time for this activity in their agricultural calendar, especially when they use seeds in very large quantities.

In essence, agricultural development efforts in Jumla, particularly in cereal crops, suffer from a lack of ability to address the specific natural and other conditions of the region. This has been the result of what Jodha et al. (1992:9) have observed to be "*development strategies for mountain agriculture [which] are simply extensions of generalised approaches that have been designed for non-mountain areas*".

### **Horticultural Development**

However, apples and walnuts present a different story. Whereas walnuts have been known to the local people for a long time, apples were introduced here also many years ago by villagers returning from places like Nainital and Kashmir in India. With the establishment of

the Remote Area Development Programme by the Government in the mid-sixties, the region made a lot of progress in the cultivation of apples, although initially the extension of this programme was brought about by deducting the price of the apple saplings that were to be sold to the farmers from the monthly salaries of Junior Technical Assistants (JTA), hence pressuring them to put pressure on the farmers to cultivate apples.

While the seventies saw an enormous spurt in the planting of apple trees, the villagers had second thoughts about expanded cultivation because of the lack of markets. A mature tree is said to bear a thousand fruits and the limited markets that exist in the tiny district headquarters and its adjoining airstrip are quickly glutted with the produce. By directive of the King, it was arranged that, for a few years, the charter flights carrying rice to the area should bring apples to Nepalgunj on the return flight. While this provided some kind of market for local produce, it was a far cry from the potential that Jumla represented.

Over the years the local people realised that it was more profitable to grow millet and wheat than the perishable apples, and, as a result, hundreds of plants in Diyargaon alone were replaced by cereal crops. Apple trees were simply neglected or not replaced when they became old and diseased. Table 11 shows the present distribution of apple trees in the village.

**Table 11: Apple Tree Ownership**

| <i>Bado</i>         | Sample households | No. of households owning apple trees | No of trees owned |           |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                     |                   |                                      | Village           | Highlands |
| 1. <i>Bahun</i>     | 10                | 9                                    | 67                | 18        |
| 2. <i>Jachauri</i>  | 8                 | 6                                    | .                 | 89        |
| 3. <i>Od (Kami)</i> | 9                 | 5                                    | 6                 | 2         |
| 4. <i>Sarki</i>     | 9                 | 3                                    | 3                 | 9         |
| 5. <i>Damai</i>     | 6                 | .                                    | .                 | .         |
| Total               | 42                | 23                                   | 77                | 118       |

Source: Field Study.

Since not everyone in the village grows apples, they are planted in fields close to the house to prevent the fruit from being stolen by children or even by older people. Given the pattern of settlement, many households do not have much land around the homestead for this purpose. Even where a tree or two could be accommodated, it is not worth the effort, given the large number of neighbours willing to make themselves welcome to the fruit.

Besides, most smallholders, of whom there are many, cannot afford to have apple trees because their cultivation excludes the cultivation of the cereal crops necessary for subsistence.

Nevertheless, the villagers are still quite optimistic about the advent of a road to Jumla and the prospects of their capitalising on this immense potentiality. Since it takes a few years for the trees to bear fruit, there are already some who have gone in for large-scale plantations on upland fields, hoping that, by the time they mature, a road will have been built. It is said that in 1990-91, there was a demand for 14,000 saplings from the district agricultural office and the government horticultural farms could provide 8,000 only. The rest were imported from farms elsewhere.

### *Walnuts*

Given the unsuccessful experience with apple growing, the villagers are now turning to walnuts. These are found to be more suitable to the roadless conditions in Jumla. Although it takes ten years for a tree to mature and bear fruit, the walnuts are not perishable like apples, have more value for their bulk (two to three to a rupee in contrast to the same rate for the much heavier apples), and are therefore more easily exportable. Table 12 gives the current distribution of walnut trees in the sample households of Diyargaon.

While households of all castes grow walnuts, the table fails to reflect the extent of the increasing priority given to this crop in recent times. Because of high mortality and the frequent theft of saplings from the distant highland fields, the villagers have already lost a large number. For instance, one household lost 29 out of 30 trees planted through mortality and theft, and another household had only three or four surviving out of 30 planted. One Jachauri household has only one left out of 25 planted. Despite these setbacks, the interest in walnuts continues to grow.

**Table 12: Walnut Tree Ownership**

| Bado                | Sample households | No of households owning walnut trees | No of trees owned in |           |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|
|                     |                   |                                      | villages             | highlands |
| 1. <i>Bahun</i>     | 10                | 6                                    | 6                    | 7         |
| 2. <i>Jachauri</i>  | 8                 | 8                                    | 4                    | 14        |
| 3. <i>Od (Kami)</i> | 9                 | 5                                    | 10                   | 2         |
| 4. <i>Sarki</i>     | 9                 | 2                                    | -                    | 15        |
| 5. <i>Damai</i>     | 6                 | 5                                    | 1                    | 8         |
| Total               | 42                | 26                                   | 21                   | 46        |

Source: Field Study

### *Agricultural Labour*

Agriculture in Jumla consists of an ongoing exercise in the optimisation of four major factors, namely, temperature, labour, water, and manure, in the context of the very limited availability of cultivable land. While in the *lekali* highlands, low temperatures, lack of water, and distance from the village prevent a more intensive use of agricultural land, the village lands, primarily the *gyula*, receive extremely high inputs of all these ingredients leading to, as stated earlier, one of the highest rates of productivity in the country.

Furthermore, of the four factors, the most elastic is labour. Thus every effort is made to maximise labour inputs not only through direct application in activities such as ploughing, planting, etc. but also through using labour to produce more manure, more water for irrigation, etc so that the limited land responds with increased yields. For instance, every possible opportunity is seized to convert rainfed land (*bhuwa*) into irrigated land (*gyula*) by extending irrigation facilities and levelling terraces which, as shown above, results in significant increases in land productivity.

### *Labour Requirements*

A great variation exists in the amount of labour required by paddy and finger millet on the one hand and the rest of the crops on the other.

For paddy, even without counting the labour involved in the preparation and cultivation of seedlings, around thirty person-days on an average are required to plant, weed, harvest, process, and store the crop in a four *muri* area (approximately one twentieth of a hectare) which, like a *hal*, takes one pair of bullocks a day to plough and is, therefore, considered as a work unit for planting operations. The major labour-demanding activities in paddy cultivation are the transplanting of seedlings (eight women labourers) and the two weeding operations which together could require between four to twenty female labourers, the well-irrigated and, therefore, softer fields requiring less.

This calculation, however, excludes the time spent on transporting the heavy doses of compost (80 *doko*, or baskets, of approximately 25 kg each, for the four *muri* area) which varies with distance from the field, but which would, on an average, require around six woman-days.

This computation also excludes the number of days (or more appropriately nights) spent by the youngsters and men of the household on continuously irrigating the paddy fields and guarding the water flow. Fist fights often ensue to prevent neighbours from diverting water to their own fields. Paddy cultivation, thus, is the most demanding in terms of labour requirements and could not possibly be sustained without the high yield rates from the crop.

Finger millet, comparatively, has some labour-saving advantages because seeds are broadcast (when they are planted early) and the irrigation needs are less. However, its weeding operations require high labour inputs (eight to 10 women in one weeding session for one *hal*) and this can be even more depending upon the amount of weeds in the field. More than 30, mostly woman-days are required for different operations between planting and harvesting and storage which, as with paddy, excludes the time spent on manuring.

Barley and wheat, in contrast, are more convenient crops because the first requires no weeding and the second rarely requires it. Beans too require only one weeding session involving around four women for one *hal*. Maize and potatoes are double cropped and the two weeding sessions for maize involve about eight persons altogether. Around four persons are required for harvesting maize from one *hal* and two for cutting the stalks for fodder. Two pairs of bullocks are needed to harvest potatoes from one *hal*, around three persons to collect them, and the same number of men to porter them to the village.

In most agricultural operations, such as planting, weeding, and harvesting, there are economies of scale involved in that people performing different tasks have to be teamed up, e.g., a pair of bullocks to plough four *muri* of rice field and a ploughman and eight women to transplant the seedlings. In order to achieve this optimisation, additional labour from other households, for which appropriate institutional arrangements exist in the village, is mobilised.

The Parma System. The most universal system of labour mobilisation is the ubiquitous institution of *parma* under which labour is exchanged between different households in the village, including across caste boundaries, for all kinds of labour needs such as planting, weeding, harvesting, ploughing (including bullocks for men), carrying manure, and threshing. Day-time meals are mostly provided by the host, although the labourer sometimes brings her own. No wages are involved.

Kamsel Labour. While the *kamsel* population in Diyargaon outnumbers the *chokha*, because of their meagre holdings, they represent the biggest labour force for *chokha* households and two major institutional mechanisms exist for their mobilisation.

Lagitya Labour. The *lagi-lagitya* system mentioned earlier is a major source of *kamsel* labour for *chokha* households. Each *chokha* household maintains at least one *lagitya* from the *Kami*, *Sarki*, and *Damai* households, and some also maintain a *Sunar* (goldsmith) and less frequently a *Lohar* (blacksmith), both of whom have the same caste status as the *Kami*.

Under this arrangement, a *kamsel lagitya* not only renders to his *chokha lagi* the products and services of his caste occupation, as and when necessary, but he also customarily contributes around six days of labour for different agricultural operations, primarily in planting, weeding, harvesting, and portering (harvest). While the *lagitya* men mostly engage in ploughing, the *Damai* men traditionally refrain from ploughing for others, to the considerable consternation of the labour-hungry, rich *chokha* households.

While maintaining *lagitya* for their occupational services has always been a part of the orthodox Hindu caste system, in Jumla it also

provides a more assured supply of much-needed agricultural labour to the *lagi* households. Therefore, the richer *chokha* households often retain a larger number of *kamsel* households in *lagitya* relationships and also use many of them for more extended periods than the normal six days mentioned above.

The *Lagi-lagitya* Population. Table 13 gives an idea of the extent of the *lagi-lagitya* involvement in the sample households included in the study.

The table shows that the *chokha* households retain more than one *lagitya* household from each of the *kamsel* castes and that, concomitantly, the *kamsel* households too maintain more than one *chokha* household as *lagi*. The table also shows that because of the internal ranking of the *kamsel*, the *Damai*, the lowest of the three, have *lagi* also among the *Kami*, who are superior. While the *Kami* have precedence also over the *Sarki*, the difference in their mutual status is less pronounced and, therefore, the two exchange occupational services through barter of labour and do not mutually entertain a *lagi-lagitya* relationship. However, one *Kami* respondent has reported two households of his own caste as *lagi*, because of the land he has received from them to cultivate in return for the labour he renders them.

**Table 13: No. of *Lagi-lagitya* Households in Diyargaon**

| Bado             | Sample households | Lagitya Households |       |       |       |       | Lagi in the Village |                 | Out-side |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|----------|
|                  |                   | Kami               | Sarki | Damai | Sunar | Lohar | Chokha              | Kami            |          |
| Chokha: Bahun    | 10                | 25                 | 18    | 10    | 7     | -     | Not applicable      |                 |          |
| Chokha: Jachauri | 8                 | 20                 | 8     | 10    | 7     | 2     | Not applicable      |                 |          |
| Kamsel: Kami     | 9                 | -----              |       |       |       |       | 21                  | 2               | 2        |
| Kamsel: Sarki    | 9                 | -----              |       |       |       |       | 29                  | -               | 9        |
| Kamsel: Damai    | 6                 | -----              |       |       |       |       | 48                  | 24 <sup>1</sup> | 508      |

Source: Field data.  
<sup>1</sup>(including 6 *Bitulo* households)

Furthermore, the *Damai* whose men, as mentioned above, refrain from ploughing for others have retained a huge number of *lagi* in other, mostly outlying, *Khas* villages where they go for a few weeks in the year and render service as tailors and minstrels. While the *Kami* and *Sarki* too have a few *lagi* in these villages, their preoccupation in their own village leaves them little time for serving a more geographically extended clientele.

### *Lagitya Remuneration*

The *lagitya* households are not paid a daily wage but instead receive *khalo* payments following different harvests. These normally consist of a *supo* (a bamboo sieve, oval-shaped on the holder's end and rectangular on the other, which is used for winnowing or otherwise as a container to move grains and estimated to measure five *pathi*) each of barley, wheat, and buckwheat and an *ungalo* (an embrace with both hands) of paddy on the straw estimated to measure about a *supo* or five *pathi* after threshing. *Lagitya* engaged for more extended services receive commensurately higher levels of payment. Similarly, there are those like the *Lohar*, as shown in the previous table, who render only occupational services and, therefore, are paid a daily wage instead of *khalo*.

All *lagitya* are held in relatively higher esteem and are dealt with with greater sympathy and consideration than a *dhagre* or a simple labourer. A *lagitya* thus receives from his *lagi* households an *ex gratia* gift of a *pathi* of paddy on each festive occasion, e.g., *Maghe Sankranti* (first day of *Magh*), *Shrawan Sankranti* (first day of *Shrawan*), and the greatest of festivals, *Dasain*. They also receive a *pathi* of paddy in *Chaitra* for paddy seedlings.

Frequently, the *lagitya* rendering extended services are also leased out some paddy land (about one to one and half *muri*) which they cultivate for themselves in addition to the normal *khalo* they receive. They are also often the beneficiaries of the used clothing of the *lagi* men and women, of additional assistance for marriages in *lagitya* households, and of gifts on similar occasions in *lagi* households. The *lagi* profess that the *lagitya* are almost like the members of their own households and, therefore, have to be treated and assisted as such.

The Haligado Arrangement. However, there are a number of richer households which need an even more extended and assured supply of labour for their farm operations. A contractual arrangement, called *haligado*, is entered into between a *chokha* household and an able-bodied and hardworking *Kami* or *Sarki* man with the former giving a parcel of *jjula* land to the latter in exchange for the labour of the *kamsel* man and his wife for different operations with all agricultural crops. The size of the *haligado* land, thus leased out, again depends on the farm size and labour requirements of the *chokha* household and ranges from one to four *muri* in Diyargaon.

The larger the size of the *haligado* land, the more exclusive the contribution of labour by the *haligado* (*kamsel*). The *haligado* who has received four *muri* of *jjula* land contributes, between himself and his wife, about 27 days of labour for all types of agricultural operation in relation to all the crops grown in the village and on *lekali* holdings. Since agricultural activities are undertaken simultaneously by all the village households, a *haligado*, or even a more involved *lagitya*, has little time to work for other households in the village. However, in order to assure that the labour supply is as little interrupted as possible by his commitments elsewhere, at the time of need, *kamsel* households with large numbers of sons are preferred as *haligado*.

As in other cases, three meals are provided to them on working days. The *haligado* man receives a good meal of rice in the morning of the day of ploughing, followed by four *roti* (roasted barley bread) as the day-time meal and two *mana* of barley flour in the evening. The females receive five *roti* in the morning (which are provided in advance by the employing *chokha* the previous night), three *roti* for the day-time meal, and two *mana* of flour in the evening.

However, the relative largesse of the *chokha* households is in evidence in other occasional payments, which are more inflated than those given to other *lagitya*. For instance, where others receive only one *pathi* in *Chaitra*, a *haligado* rendering the aforesaid services receives four. The same proportion is true for other occasional payments too, including inflated *khalo* payments and small portions of other crops like beans, millet, etc. A parcel of *lekali* land is also occasionally leased to him on which he plants maize and potatoes.

Other gifts of clothing, and grain too, accompany the *haligado* relationship in an expanded form, including providing additional food

when a son is born to the *haligado* or an interest-free loan to pay the bride price in case the *haligado* or his son abducts another's wife.

While the system of intercaste relationships in Diyargaon, as elsewhere in the Karnali Zone, is based on the orthodox Hindu practice of caste segregation and occupational specialisation, the imperatives of intensive agriculture have further strengthened it in a manner leading to the maximum mobilisation of *kamsel* labour.

Given the traditionally skewed distribution of land in favour of the *chokha*, the savings generated remain with the *chokha*, and what most *kamsel* households receive from them is only a subsistence ration which often has to be supplemented by borrowing food grains from them during the lean months from *Magh* through *Baisakh* against the labour they promise to supply during the ensuing agricultural operations. In the winter of 1991, the *Sarki* and *Damai* were the most prolific borrowers, accounting for 43 and 78 such transactions, each of them representing little more than the amount of daily wages they received in paddy or barley flour.

So much are the *kamsel* used to such a state of dependence on the *chokha* that they see no problem in having a lot of children. They reason that, whereas the females will be married off or elope, the boys will grow to work on *chokha* land, and this will ensure them of the necessary subsistence. For the *kamsel*, the *chokha* households are their basic property which are received in inheritance, divided between brothers, and, sometimes, even bestowed as dowry to a daughter in marriage.

### *Female Labour*

The major brunt of agricultural labour in Jumla rests on its female population. As stated in the earlier section of this report, the traditional division of functions between the sexes places the responsibility for food security squarely in the province of women, and this ranks them amongst the hardest working women in the world. The female members of even the richest households in the village can hardly be distinguished from their counterparts in the poorest households in terms of the amount of work they do. What visible difference does exist is limited to the contents and quality of their attire.

There are hardly any days or any time of the year when women have free time. The local belief has it that it is highly inauspicious to have women sitting idle, and every woman takes this quite seriously, especially when she is living with her mother-in-law. This is taken to such extremes that, in one case, a daughter-in-law in one of the richest households in the village, in a state of advanced pregnancy, gave birth to her third child only minutes after she had returned home with other family women with a huge load of grass fodder in the evening. A general calendar of female activities throughout the year is given in Table 14.

Although this calendar shows the intensity and variety of the household and agriculture-related tasks performed by women in the village, this happens to be a man-made calendar and, therefore, is by no means a complete record of the full range of tasks shouldered by women.

A day in the life of a woman in Diyargaon begins early in the morning, sweeping the floors and preparing the food for the cattle and other livestock, feeding them grass, and milking the cows and buffaloes. The cattle have to be seen off to the pastures above the village.

The cattle shed has to be cleaned, the dung and soiled bedding brought to the courtyard for composting, and new bedding of dried pine needles spread for another four days. No sooner are these tasks done than carrying manure to the fields begins, while other women attend to preparing meals in the kitchen.

Women serve food to household members as well as to the labourers hired for the day for ploughing. Oil, too, has to be pressed from different kinds of seeds including those of gourd. A sour dish has to be prepared from fruits collected from the forest. They wash clothes and the floors of the house. Rice has to be pounded quite regularly. For this, paddy too has to be regularly dried. Utensils have to be cleaned morning and evening. And, of course, they have to also look after their children.

Women, therefore, play the major role in the planning and management of agriculture in Jumla, providing the most labour in the process. While men hang around loitering or playing cards, the women are working every waking moment of the day.

**Table 14: Calendar of Women's Activities**

| Areas of work   | Baisakh   | Jeshta  | Ashadh   | Shrawan                                    | Bhadra  | Aswin   | Kartik                                 | Mangsir                             | Poush                                  | Magh                                 | Fagun                    | Chaitra                  |
|-----------------|---|---|--|--|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| House-hold work | Bring food grains to water mill; manure preparation | Weed chillies & vegetables                          | Weed paddy & millet                                      | Weed chillies, potatoes, & maize           | Foodgrain to water-mill; fodder cutting for buffalo | Harvest chillies                                  | Make bad (a food); dry chillies        | Make manure; thresh & screen millet | Cut fire-wood; pound rice; make manure | Pound rice; shovel snow; feed cattle | Pound rice; carry manure | Pound rice; carry manure |
| Jyula           | Transport manure to Jyula                           | Harvest & carry barley; plant paddy & finger millet | Weed paddy & finger millet                               | Second weeding of paddy & millet           | Weed paddy & millet                                 | Cut grass on the paddy terrace wall               | Harvest paddy; cut straw; thresh paddy | Plant wheat; break sods             | -                                      | -                                    | Carry manure             | Carry manure             |
| Ghadari         | Weed wheat; make manure                             | Plant millet; weed maize; potatoes                  | Plant chillies; weed millet                              | Weed maize                                 | -   | Harvest millet; cut stalk; porter millet          | Harvest beans; plant wheat             | Plant wheat; break sods             | -                                      | -                                    | Carry manure             | Carry manure             |
| Lekai           | Plant maize; potatoes; beans; weed wheat; barley    | Weed maize; potatoes; beans; cut firewood           | Harvest potatoes; maize; beans; harvest and carry barley | Manure by bringing cattle from the village | Harvest beans                                       | Harvest common millet; Italian millet; buck-wheat | Plant wheat; carry potatoes            | Cut stalks; plant barley            | -                                      | -                                    | Carry manure             | Carry manure             |
| Forest          | Collect pine needles; bring firewood                | -   | Collect pine needles; bring firewood for lekai           | Collect needles for lekai                  | Cut grass; firewood for Poush through Baisakh       | Cut grass   | -                                      | Cut firewood; collect pine needles  | Cut firewood                           | Cut firewood                         | Cut firewood             | Cut firewood             |

## Irrigation

### *Kumthi Management of Canals*

The high productivity of *jjula* land in the village is critically supported by a meticulous system of irrigation which is serviced by two major canals originating from two different rivers. The older of the two is called the Jachauri *kulo* (or the Jachauri canal) after its creator, and it is supposed to date back to the ancient unidentifiable times of "the *Marulle* king". It has been sustained by a strong beneficiary-based, local institutional arrangement called *kumthi* (which has nothing to do with the English word "committee"), whose members are called *kumthel* and who are paid by the *jjula* owners receiving irrigation water.

While canals with an abundant water supply are not managed by a *kumthi*, each canal requiring protection at the source and proper, equitable distribution from its network has a *kumthi* of its own. Each *kumthi* consists of between one to three able-bodied, hardworking, just and poor local men chosen, or reconfirmed, every year through informal consultation among the beneficiaries in the community.

The *kumthi* goes into action from the month of *Chaitra* when water is needed to irrigate paddy seedbeds. Only one person is sufficient to begin with, and this person is joined by one or two more in *Jestha* depending upon the rainfall and the expected quantity of water available at the source.

When an abundant quantity of water is available, the *kumthel* stand guard at the source, and the distribution of water in the village network is looked after by the villagers themselves. In practice this means water is sufficient for all the villagers in the quantity and at the time needed.

However, if the water is relatively scarce, it means stiffer competition for it at the source among the several different villages who share it. During such seasons, physical strength matters and, therefore, the villagers go there in sufficiently large numbers to deter any possible transgression by people from other villages, while the *kumthel* continue to distribute water equitably to the village.

## Competition for Water

The *kumthel*, for reasons beyond their control, are not always successful in achieving their egalitarian mandate. When the water is less than sufficient, people steal water during the night. Therefore, the *jjula* owners literally spend their entire nights in the field in order to make sure that their neighbours do not divert it to their own plots. Scuffles are not uncommon.

The *kumthel* work for a period of seven months from *Chaitra* through *Kartik* and are paid at the rate of four *mana* (1 *mana* = 0.568 litres) per *muri* of land. The *kumthel* on an average make about eight *khal* (1 *khal* = 45.44 litres) in a year.

As mentioned earlier, since irrigation is crucial for maintaining *jjula* productivity, the maintenance of the existing canals and their extension, wherever possible, are undertaken on a priority basis. Each year, labour is mobilised at the rate of one person per household to go to the source of the canal and clean it to facilitate a smooth flow of water. Capital improvements are undertaken to strengthen and stabilise the canal bunds.

The construction of a new canal, which was initially undertaken in 2032 B.S. (1975 A.D.) with a small grant of Rs. 7,000 from the then District *panchayat*, was completed with financial resources mobilised from the owners of the command area; initially at the rate of 35 rupees per *muri* which later increased to 40, then to 50, and then 60 before the project was finally completed.

## Credit

There is great deal of debt in Diyargaon, but each group is in debt for different reasons and with different lenders. Table 15 gives the extent of debt among the sample households.

It should be noted in this table that the loans taken by the *chokha* households of *Bahun* and *Jachauri bado* are fewer in number and larger in average size, while the *kamsel* households of *Od*, *Sarki*, and *Damai bado* are relatively more numerous and smaller in size.

Table 15: Extent of Debt

| <i>Bado</i>     | No. of households in sample | No. of indebted households | No. of outstanding debts | Total amount (Rs) | Amount per debt (Rs) |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Bahun</i>    | 10                          | 7                          | 14                       | 92000             | 6571                 |
| <i>Jachauri</i> | 8                           | 3                          | 3                        | 7630              | 2543                 |
| <i>Od</i>       | 9                           | 5                          | 14                       | 19020             | 1359                 |
| <i>Sarki</i>    | 9                           | 6                          | 12                       | 14000             | 1167                 |
| <i>Damai</i>    | 6                           | 6                          | 51                       | 112487            | 2206                 |
| Total           | 42                          | 27                         | 94                       | 245137            | 2608                 |

### *Purpose*

The cause of this difference is to be found generally in the purpose of and source of these credits. While the *chokha* households generally borrow for purposes of capital investment, mostly for buying land, further lending, or investing in the house, although not exclusively so, the *kamsel* households borrow primarily for consumption, e.g., buying foodgrains and clothes, treatment of illnesses, celebrating a festival or marriage, or even paying a bride price. Capital investments, such as buying land or bullocks or cows or fodder, are undertaken by them, but only rarely. Many loans are taken to pay off old debts.

It is because of this emphasis on consumption that the *kamsel* debts are smaller and more numerous. Most debts are of one thousand rupees or less. There are also a number of *kamsel* debts that they have inherited from their deceased fathers, and the *chokha* lenders are in no hurry to call them in because they are also useful as a way of keeping the debtor *kamsel* beholden to them.

These credits, however, largely exclude the many short-term loans taken by villagers who seasonally migrate to trade or work in India. These are paid back to the lender almost immediately upon the borrower's return.

### *Sources of Credit and the Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP)*

There exists a definite difference in pattern regarding the sources of credit between the richer *chokha* and poorer *kamsel* households. While

the richest of the households, around half a dozen of them, desist from taking any loans even from the cheapest source, namely, the Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP); the middle ranking households, mostly belonging to *chokha* groups, use this source frequently in order to obtain loans, technically and ostensibly for the prescribed purposes of agricultural development, e.g., cattle husbandry, horse and mule breeding, sheep and goat rearing, potato growing, or cottage industries. However, in effect, such loans are used mainly for buying land, investing in profitable ventures such as buying and selling horses, or for further lending to poorer people whose access to SFDP is limited or non-existent.

However, not all *chokha* loans come from this source only. They also borrow from sources in the village or outside. For instance, of the 14 loans of the seven borrowing households in the *Bahun bado*, only six loans belonging to an equal number of households, representing a sum of 61 thousand (or 66.3 per cent of the total debt in that group), came from SFDP sources. Five loans came from other villages. But all the three loans of the *Jachauri* households came from SFDP sources.

For most *kamsel* households, however, the sources of credit are local lenders inside and outside the village. Of the 77 different outstanding loans of the three groups, only five came from SFDP, four of which were taken to pay off the old debts to the local lenders and those from adjoining villages. Often, as mentioned above, the *chokha* borrowers from SFDP are lenders to the small-time *kamsel* borrowers.

According to SFDP policy, potential borrowers are to be organised into groups of small farmers and loans are to be made to members on the recommendations of these groups. The groups are expected to assess the credit needs of individual members for the agricultural development venture that each one wants to undertake and to recommend to the Project Office accordingly. Therefore, loans are extended to the applicants based on group liability. This means that, if the borrower defaults on repayment, no further loans are made to any member of the group and that the defaulted loan itself has to be repaid by the rest of the members collectively.

In *Diyargaon*, while two such groups are said to exist, they do so only on paper to facilitate the funnelling of loans to individual applicants who are dealt with directly by project officials, for they all know that the loans are not used for the stated purposes.

## Collateral

SFDP loans need collateral (exclusively land deeds). Given the skewed distribution of agricultural land, it is the *chokha* households that naturally have more land deeds than their *kamsel* counterparts.

Most local moneylenders give large loans ranging from two to 11 thousand rupees; loans are given also against the mortgage of land, primarily highly-valued paddy land. Often, a *kamsel* obtains a large loan of a couple of thousand rupees against a mortgage of the paddy land of his *chokha lagi* who has given him the right of usufruct in return for services as his *haligado*. Since this ties him down to the *chokha* household irrevocably, it means an assured labour supply for the latter and is, therefore, quite acceptable to him.

A *kamsel* also receives a loan against assurance that he will work for the *chokha* lender to level the latter's *ghaderi* into *gyula* at some future date. But most small loans are given against promissory notes made out by the lender on which the illiterate borrowers merely place their thumb prints.

## Interest Rates

The SFDP loans are relatively much cheaper and are available at an interest rate of 18 per cent, per year for the most popular livestock loans. But, for the remainder of the loans in the village, it is a lenders' market, and the interest rates charged range anywhere from 40 per cent to 100 per cent depending upon the degree of desperation of the borrower. To make it look less severe (and actually more profitable), the duration of the loan is often six months, and the interest is 50 per cent of the principal. Thus a thousand rupees earn an interest of 500 rupees in six months, after which the unpaid interest begins to compound.

Given the fact that many of these loans are intended for tiding over crises like food needs, sickness in the family, payment of bride price, and etc, the borrowers are often quite desperate. It is so much worse if the borrower happens to be poor and has many unpaid loans. These factors give him a very low credit rating in the community.

It is basically the meagre size of *kamsel* holdings, combined with their traditional dependance on the *chokha* households, that make them prolific and desperate borrowers. Although they try to juggle their way through different loans by using a recent one to pay off an old one, it is basically a balancing act that results in a quagmire. Thus, they are naturally prone to defaulting on loans, and the lenders are quick to compound the interest until the problem is solved by putting up a parcel of the borrower's land for sale, usually to one of the lenders.

Presently, it is the *Damai* more than any other *kamsel* who are going through this ordeal. Four *Damai* households have already migrated to India, resulting primarily from this sustained exploitation coupled with their traditional abhorrence of ploughing for others.

The *Sarki* have been through this ordeal already. Today, many of the *Sarki*, having sold off their traditional places of residence long ago, have built houses, on a plot of land that belongs to a rich man in the village on whom they are completely dependent, knowing that they can be evicted any time.

All able-bodied *Sarki* today are fully occupied in *haligado* relationships with *chokha* overlords. While this provides them with very useful security, they have, however, forfeited their liberty to migrate from the village to India for long periods of time, which a number of *Damai* and *Kami* men do. They know that being absent at the time of ploughing means losing the *haligado* land which is often the primary source of their sustenance. A number of them have, in recent times, tried to improve their economic condition by taking up the building trade that traditionally belonged to the *Od Kami*.

Many *kamsel* are today wary of taking loans in the village because, it often happens, that there is a great deal of dishonesty on the part of the lenders. They claim that if one borrows 500 rupees, the loan is compounded to four to five thousand rupees in a year or two. The trap is set in more than one way: not only by way of inflated interest rates but also by entering higher, fictitious figures in the promissory note to which the desperate and illiterate borrower innocently and hastily affixes his thumb print. There are a number of loans that are quite small - e.g., four "*mohar*" (i.e., fifty paise coins) borrowed during the father's time in one case - but which continue to be held by the lender because they can be used against the borrower at any time.

Rendering a *kamsel* indebted is almost a sport for the rich *chokha* because the aftermath is so very rewarding for the latter. So, with the advent of festivals like *Dasain* or *Shrawan Sankranti* (the first day of *Shrawan*), the *chokha* tends to invite the *kamsel* over and entice him with an offer of a loan to celebrate them. The *kamsel* too, on his part, has been traditionally incapable of resisting this temptation and falls into the trap. The money is instantly given, but the paper is made out only some days later after the money has been spent. The obsession for lending is so intense that, in one case, a *chokha*, for want of ready cash, lent a *kamsel* one of his golden ornaments at an interest of 200 rupees for six months. The latter in order to generate the cash he needed, mortgaged this with somebody else and again had to pay interest to him.

Often moneylenders can be quite atrocious in their dealings with borrowers. They just walk into a defaulter's house and pick up any piece of movable property, such as a cow, a goat, a chicken, a new piece of clothing, or a utensil, in lieu of the alleged arrears in interest. So hard has such demeanour been on the indebted that a lender, who may charge the same inflated 50 per cent in interest, will still be held in much higher esteem than others if he does not exact payment immediately after the lapse of the stipulated duration of the credit.

Given such a situation of "saturation indebtedness", a SFDP official has maintained that, unless the local people are liberated from the all-pervasive shackles of such indebtedness, SFDP's credit programme stands little chance of making any dent on the problems of poverty in the village.

As a means of bracing themselves against *chokha* oppression, some semblance of *kamsel* solidarity is visible. There are a number of loans made by one *Sarki* to another, ranging between 50 rupees to 200, for which no interest is expected because of fellow feeling. But this is far from being a universal phenomenon.

## Livestock

As indicated earlier, livestock constitute a major component of agriculture in Jumla, both as sources of traction power and manure, as well as for products such as wool, meat, milk and milk products, cash income through sale, and also as a means of transportation for high altitude dwellers.

## *Types and Numbers of Livestock*

While there are sub-regional specificities in the kind of livestock preferred, such as *yak*, *nak*, and *jhopa* (cross-breed of *yak* or *nak* with common cattle) among the *Mugali* and similar border people and sheep and goats among the *Khas* (also called *Pawai* by the *Jyulels* or the inhabitants of *Jyula*), at higher altitudes, cattle, buffaloes, horses, sheep, and goats are generally popular among people in the river valleys. In recent times, mules have also become increasingly popular as a beast of burden for the commercial transport of goods, particularly from the southern market town of Surkhet to Jumla.

In Diyargaon, the sample households owned 82 cows, 36 calves, 53 bullocks, 19 male calves, five buffaloes, eight horses, and 42 goats. Of these the cows and female calves together totalled 118 and the bullocks (including the male calves) 72, which comes to an average of 2.8 cows and 1.7 bulls per household.

As in land distribution, there exists an acute disparity, based on caste status, in the ownership of livestock. The eighteen *chokha* households (or 42 per cent of the sample) owned 59 cows, 12 male-calves, 22 calves, 43 bullocks, four buffaloes, seven horses, and 42 goats, which constituted 72, 61, 81, 63, 80, 87.5, and 100 per cent respectively of the total number in the sample. This results in a larger per household distribution of livestock in which the cows account for 4.5 head and bulls three head per household among the *chokha* population, in contrast to 1.5 cows and 0.7 bulls per household for the *kamsel*.

## *Changes in Livestock Ownership*

There has not been a perceptible change in the ownership of livestock in the last two decades in Diyargaon. In 1970, the sample of 21 *chokha* households mentioned earlier had between them a total of 112 cows and 48 bulls of all ages, of which one exceptionally large household alone owned 55 and nine of them respectively. Thus, while the per household distribution of cows and bullocks was 5.3 head of cows and 2.3 head of bulls, the average ownership was 2.8 head of cows and two head of bulls per household when the large household was excluded from the computation.

Other livestock consisted of nine female buffaloes owned by four households, 11 horses with three households, and nine sheep and 17 goats with four households.

The comparison can be seen in Table 16.

**Table 16: Comparative Livestock Ownership in Diyargaon**

| Livestock                | 1990                               |                     | 1970          |           |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------|
|                          | No                                 | heads/<br>household | No            | heads/hhd |
|                          | 42 households                      |                     |               |           |
|                          |                                    |                     |               |           |
| Cows (including calves)  | 118                                | 2.8                 |               |           |
| Bulls (including calves) | 72                                 | 1.7                 |               |           |
| Horses                   | 8                                  |                     |               |           |
| Buffaloes                | 5                                  |                     |               |           |
| Goats                    | 42<br>(owned by 2 households only) |                     |               |           |
|                          | 18 households                      |                     | 21 households |           |
|                          |                                    |                     | No            | heads/hhd |
| Cows                     | 81                                 | 4.5                 | 112           | 5.3       |
| Bulls                    | 48                                 | 3.0                 | 48            | 2.3       |

Source: 1991 data based on field survey.  
1970 data based on Shrestha (1971: 50-51).

These data, however, conceal the fact that, in the past, some households were much better off pastorally than at present. For instance, in the 1970 sample, the aforementioned rich household owned an even larger herd estimated to consist of 160 to 170 cows, 13 buffaloes, 20 to 25 mares, and 240 sheep which had to use a much wider range of habitats than those in their immediate vicinity. Much of the herd was wintered in the warm pastures and forests of Bajura district to the south-west of Jumla in the winter, and the animals were brought to a number of rich highland pastures in Jumla district during the summer.

But, with the increase in population and expansion of cultivation in Bajura, the pastures and forests were appropriated by the local people, to the detriment of the seasonal visitors from Jumla. Likewise, closer to home, the establishment of the Rara Wildlife Sanctuary was followed by the closure of important pastures such as Lumkad, Chuchemara, Gorseen, and Dunela in the higher reaches of Jumla. As a direct consequence of these major upheavals, the cattle population declined drastically. The same household today cannot boast of more than 21 cows and bulls, two buffaloes, two mares, and four goats; the latter being given for share-cropping to their *ista* in adjacent *Khas (Pawai)* villages.

The people in highland villages were even harder hit because of the greater role that pastoralism played in their household economy. It is said that they too sold off parts of their herds and used the proceeds to buy land in and around the Surkhet Valley down south.

Even food habits have changed. Whereas, in the past, some men in the richer households drank only *khah* (a milk product made by boiling around eight litres of milk in an earthen pot into a concentrated preparation of about one litre), nowadays even buttermilk has become a cherished delicacy for them.

### *Seasonal Movement of Livestock*

Given the nature of the habitat, the local people have to move the livestock through different high altitude pastures during the summer and autumn months, although they are now more distant and qualitatively inferior to those that came under the Rara Wildlife Sanctuary.

Horses and cattle are taken to graze in different meadows, the latter in places closer to the village because bullocks are regularly needed to plough the fields there and in the uplands. While most goats are given to the *Pawai* in higher settlements to graze with larger flocks, the pattern for them is the same as that of the cattle.

After the paddy harvest in mid-*Kartik*, the horses and cattle are brought back to the village. But in *Poush*, they are again brought to graze away from the cold wind along the Sinja River to the sunny and warmer south-facing slopes of the adjoining mountains where there is also a more plentiful supply of grass fodder.

Around mid-*Chaitra*, when agricultural activities begin to increase with the preparation of paddy seeds, both cattle and horses leave the village and move through a number of near and distant pastures until mid-*Kartik*. Because of the closure of important pastures by the wildlife park, people now keep their livestock in smaller pastures for more extended periods, a month instead of the five days that they used to keep them for in the past. The chart on the following page gives an idea about the present and past patterns of movement of Diyargaon livestock.

The usufruct of different pastures had been traditionally linked to different villages in the valley, and they did not trespass on each other's territory. But with the dislocations caused by the establishment of the Park, some pastures, like Chhala Chaur for instance, are now more crowded. Even scuffles have been known to occur between the traditional users and new intruders, leading to reconciliations based on the appreciation by the former of the latter's plight and on the condition that the latter's herds must be constantly watched and kept separate by shepherds.

#### *Changes in Organisation of Pasturing*

In the past, when the cattle population was large, a traditional institutional mechanism called *saundi* was used. Under this arrangement, flock owners went to the pastures in small groups of three or four people, or sometimes even more. Some *saundi* were bigger than others and they handled varying numbers of livestock. One such *saundi* of Diyargaon had four members and had more than three hundred cows and some fifteen buffaloes. Each member of the *saundi* took turns to porter milk products, mainly ghee and *galim* (cream for making ghee), to the *saundi* households in the village to bring back salt for the animals. Milk was too bulky to handle over that distance.

Following the drastic reduction in the livestock population, people say that the word *saundi* is no longer a part of the local vocabulary. Now it has been replaced by another arrangement called *naso*, meaning giving and holding in trust. Under this arrangement, the households with only a few cattle entrust them to one with a relatively larger herd which takes them to pasture along with its own animals. While this is a gesture of goodwill and friendship on the latter's part, the former too compensates by visiting the pasture occasionally with salt for all the animals or food for the host household.

**Table 17: Calendar of Movement of the Diyargaon Livestock**

| Type of livestock   | Baisakh                           | Jeshtha                                     | Ashadh                                | Shrawan                                   | Bhadra   | Aswin                                 | Kartik  | Mangsir              | Poush         | Magh/Fagun  | Chaitra                |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------|---------------|---|------------------------|
| Names of pastures used for different months, parentheses indicate distance in hours |                                   |   |                                       |   |  |                                       |   |                      |               |   |                        |
| Horses  | Close to home, Thapla, Sera (<1)  | Chhala chaur (>5)                           | Jajjala, Majh Patan, Mathi Patan (>6) | Dayapi (>2 days)                          | Dayapi   | Thapla, Bnaodar Badimeli, Mool; (1-2) | Thapla, Bnaodar, Badimeli, Mool; and Jyula i.e., village paddy fields after 15 Kartik | Jyula in the village | Like in Aswin | Grazing in village fields or stall-fed in the village | Chaukhy Jila-Chaur (1) |
| Cattle  | Salirna-lagna, Tallo Badimeli (1) | Melepani Gani, Syala and Kurila Chaur (1-2) | Goruodar, Mere & Gani (1-2)           | Thula Kharaka, Goruodar, Pachhaigad (2-3) | Mauri Bheed, Syala, Mere, Sera, Syalakot, Gani, Pachhaigad | *                                     | *   | *                    | *             | *   | Mere, Thapla, Baondar. |
| During the pre-sanctuary days   |                                   |   |                                       |   |  |                                       |   |                      |               |   |                        |
| Horses  | *                                 | Chhala Chaur                                | Jajjala, Dunela, Gorseen, Chuchumare  | Dayapi, Dunela, Gorseen, Chuchumare       | Dunela, Chuchumare, Rola                                   | *                                     | *   | *                    | *             | *   | *                      |
| Cattle  | *                                 | *   | *                                     | (Except Dayapi)                           | *  | *                                     | *   | *                    | *             | *   | *                      |

## *Forces of Change Affecting Pastoralism*

Although the establishment of the wildlife park and the expansion of cultivation in the lower reaches have adversely affected livestock farming in the villages of Jumla, it does not tell the whole story. Two modern forces have also played a role.

Traditionally, the extended family structure of the well-to-do *chokha* households assigned different roles to different sons according to birth order. While the first son was expected to act as a *thalu*, that is, to visit courts and other government officers in Jumla and to write legal papers, the youngest assisted the father in the management of the farm. Thus, it was the task of the middle son to attend to the livestock farming, and this involved living away from home for extended periods of time.

With the increased accessibility of educational facilities it was no longer acceptable to the middle son that he went to live in the wilderness while his brothers attended school.

Secondly, with the expansion of trade between the southern towns and the Karnali hinterland, the people realised that this pursuit was more profitable than herding cattle in remote pastures. Thus, combined with the closure of good pastures and changes in the value system in favour of education, a shift in the economy brought about a rather accelerated decline in the livestock population of Diyargaon.

It is also said that the loss of good pastures and of the especially nutritious *buki* grass have badly affected the health of the cattle population leading to a decrease in its numbers, forcing the diversification of economic pursuits.

### *Managing Fodder for Wintering the Livestock*

As mentioned earlier, the livestock spend most of the winter months between *Kartik* through *Chaitra* in the village or in the pastures in its vicinity. While they are left to graze on open spaces, they are also fed on fodder grass cut from the mountain sides surrounding the village and stored by the women during the two months before the onset of winter. This, therefore, involves the protection of the grassy slopes from premature encroachment from humans and animals. For this

purpose, a special local official, also called a *naralo*, as in the case of barley crops, is appointed to regulate the movement of livestock to keep them away from these grasses from the first of *Shrawan* to the end of *Bhadra* every year. This system will be further discussed under the chapter on forestry.

Unlike the forest area, these grassy slopes are not openly accessible to all. Locally, these sites are called *mela*, which is a generic term used to denote either work or holdings, and each of these sites is privately owned by the households. While rich households also have larger tracts of *mela* in the village, the Jachauri households are said to own more than most households because of their traditional emphasis on hunting, primarily the once highly lucrative trade of ensnaring and training falcons and selling them in the markets of the then undivided India. The pursuit of this trade requires holding a title to the mountain sites where the birds of prey can be ensnared.

Those who traditionally do not own such *mela*, like the *Od Kami*, get what little supply of grass they need from that growing on the communally-owned open spaces on the ridge adjoining the village to the north.

## CHAPTER 3

# Forestry

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The condition of Diyargaon's forest resources is characterised by the two diametrically opposed approaches of meticulous management and conservation, on the one hand, and deforestation on the other. As stated earlier, the local people have expanded their agricultural holdings by steadily clearing the land of its forest cover in the upper reaches of the region. This has been facilitated by the fact that different clan groups in the village have traditionally claimed specific areas therein.

A cadastral survey still remains to be carried out in the Karnali Zone. The ownership of the *pakho* (unirrigated land) is represented by the amount of homestead tax paid (*serma*) which is computed in terms of money, more specifically in terms of *paisa* and their constituent quarters, called *dam*. Therefore, this practice allows individual households to extend their farm area as necessary and still claim that their expanded holdings are within the limits of the tax paid. When a household is divided, the tax money is also divided proportionately, but the new households are under no restraint to clear new lands as necessary, as long as land is available.

## Dwindling Forest Areas in the Zone

At present, the possibility of clearing new lands is almost non-existent. As stated earlier, some seventy-five years ago, an epidemic had decimated the local population forcing them to withdraw from their cultivated highland fields for want of labour, and apparently one can still come across marks of terraces in areas with forest cover.

Although a few patches with forest cover still remain, its rightful owner is generally identified and no trespassing or encroachment takes place, except in a few known cases of *kamsel* ownership where the might of the more powerful *chokha* households had prevailed, resulting in the former's eviction from their uncleared lands.

It is said that, since the 1950s, increasing population growth in the zone has triggered a marked upsurge in forest deterioration which is now approaching critical proportions. Each Karnali household of six persons is estimated to have cut, collected, and consumed 6,100 kg of wood for fuel and heating in 1969/70. Based on the comparison of 1950 maps and 1972 Landsat imagery, it was suggested (although with caution as 1972 figures might have been underestimated) that approximately 50 per cent of the zone's forests were destroyed during the two decades, leaving less than 20 per cent of the Karnali Zone still under forest cover (Bishop 1990: 268-269).

The extension of cultivation to the upper reaches of the zone (estimated to be well above 4,000 metres) is quite visible when observing the surrounding mountains from the high altitude passes in Jumla district. As a result, the river waters, which otherwise are crystal clear most of the year, turn very turbid for a day or two following the rains.

The scarcity of land at high altitudes resulted in the seizure of even community property, commonly designated as *sandhi sarpan* in the vernacular (the property that is critically important to all the members of the community for its use as a common grazing ground, funeral ground, or religious property, etc), by the village elite. Where such an incursion was likely to arouse community hostility, they would gang up with other powerful households in the clan and appropriate the property collectively so that the resentment of the villagers was muted.

Although rival factions and centres of power exist in the community, they refuse to take a more public stand against such acts of encroachment on common property, because even their leaders have similar records of misappropriation and extortion. Hence, they pretend not to have noticed it. The entire cultural milieu has all along been characterised by a tradition of such fierce inter-personal competition and tacit collusions for securing resources.

### **The Village Forests**

At least in Diyargaon, however, the village forests are a different story. The village is surrounded by mountains on the north, east, south, and south-west, and they are either covered by pine forests or are in the process of being so. The village women, whose exclusive task is to bring firewood from the forest, do not have to walk more than twenty minutes to reach the forest.

The villagers use forest products rather liberally under the conviction, apparently borne out by experience, that the forests today are more dense than in the past. To substantiate their claim, they point to one of the mountain sides which was once known as *eklo sallo* or, "the lonely pine", and which had only one big pine tree on it. Today, there are pines growing in thousands on the slope. It is said that the villagers, under the influence of the government's Community Forestry Programme, abandoned the traditional practice of burning the slopes ten years ago, and this resulted in better grass yields for livestock and such, through nascent, massive regeneration of forest.

The forest to the north, on the mountain ridge, locally called *thapala*, immediately above the village, is as stated earlier, even more assiduously protected. Some twenty-five years ago, a landslide destroyed a Hamal house in *Bahun bado* situated immediately above that of a man who was important locally. The people realised that cultivation of this ridge must be prevented at all costs, and that it must be protected by permanent forest cover. Therefore, despite the fact that it too carried marks of previous cultivation, it was given the status of *sandhi sarpan* and was entered as such in the government land records. By doing so, not only were attempts, by some land-hungry *Od Kami* in the village, to till it successfully held in abeyance, as mentioned earlier, but also the more muted, and obviously more justified, claim over it by a neighbouring highland village which

apparently had cultivated it way back in the past and which, more recently, had lost a considerable portion of its holdings elsewhere to the Wildlife Park.

In an incident that took place 18 years ago, a young wife of an old Hamal, in one of her outbursts of fury, set fire to this forest to punish the whole village. However, the entire village was immediately mobilised, and they managed to control the fire with the help of a pine bush.

Last year, in March 1991, a grassy slope to the west of the village accidentally caught fire. At that time also, the villagers put it out through similar means and organisation.

Local people take pride in the fact that this forest has been growing steadily and the tree line has now approached the ridge. Since pine trees grow and spread faster than most other species, they claim that the denudation and desertification of the mountain slopes will never occur here. While of late, a local elite is suspected of having stealthily registered a local forest in his name and of deliberately encouraging the excessive cutting of trees in order to clear it; most of the villagers agree that forest cover has been increasing in the meantime.

### **Deterioration of Village Forests**

Despite the improvement in terms of firewood availability and timber supply for house construction, the big tree trunks necessary for making planks for doors as well as for wooden grain storage bins are no longer available in the nearby forests. The *Kami*, who make the bins, recall their fathers saying that such large trees were available much closer to home in the local forests. But today it takes six days of work between eight in the morning to six in the evening, which includes several hours of walking to and from the forest, to collect a sufficient number of planks to manufacture a regular bin measuring five feet in height, eight feet in length, and two feet in width.

With population growth and the need for more houses, combined with the fact that every 20 to 30 years the houses need to be rebuilt, increasing pressure will be exerted on the forests for timber. But the local inhabitants do not seem alarmed by it.

A drastic reduction in beekeeping is another consequence of the deterioration in forest quality. The temperate climate of the Karnali Zone is suitable for peaches, and some half a dozen different varieties of the peach such as *chame*, *jhuse*, *galane*, *goru*, *ophde*, and *chule*, each with different characteristics, grew wild in the mountain foothills across the river and provided necessary nutrition to the bees that once nested in the numerous hives in the village. However, with the expansion of cultivation and increased availability of irrigation facilities in the area, the land has been cleared of these plants to make room for agriculture, particularly paddy cultivation. This has since resulted in a drastic reduction in bee population, the number of hives, and the number of households that kept them.

### Forests and Agriculture

An important reason for the protection and maintenance of forests is one of its major products, the *piral*, i.e., the fallen pine needles. These are used as bedding for the animals which is changed every four days. Later, it decomposes into manure which is used for *gyula* and *ghaderi* fields.

The *piral* is used particularly for agricultural purposes and, according to the local custom (*ritithiti*), it is collected jointly by village women once a year in *Baisakh* from small forests and twice a year from larger ones in *Baisakh* and *Mangsir*. Specific dates for collection are decided by the community and are timed to coincide with periods of lighter work loads for women and the possibility of five sunny days in a row, which is the time normally required for collection, ending with a picnic. However, its interruption by rain causes the community exercise to be called off in the middle, because the needles are no longer dry and loose enough for raking.

The decision-making process is informal but strictly obeyed. The decision as to the day on which to begin collection for *Baisakh* 2048 (April 1991) had informally originated from the women of one of the richest and largest households in the village. On that particular morning, all the village women wait in anticipation for those from that household to make the first move towards the forest, after which it turns into a sprint for all of them. People generally agree that these decisions are heavily influenced by households with large landholdings and political influence in the community.

While nobody even conceives of bringing *piral* home at other times, apart from an occasional load or two for use in roofing, there is stiff competition between women in bringing home the largest number of loads. Starting around seven in the morning, each woman stakes a claim to a patch of forest from where she collects pine needles, and, by nine, the first, immense load will already have been carried home. Some even dare to cheat by entering the forest earlier.

On an average, each woman carries about six loads on the first day, and this drops to three the next day because of the rapid depletion of pine needles after the previous day's collection. While it is considered a sin to have married daughters carry manure, there are no such qualms in the case of pine needles because their application as manure is crucial to the high productivity of their *gyula* and *ghaderi* fields. Therefore, they are especially invited to their parents' homes to help them collect more. If the pine needles are not sufficient, women supplement the *piral* with other green leaves and grass collected during the month of *Bhadra* when vegetation flourishes.

### Forest Management System

As is the case for irrigation and crop protection, Diyargaon also possesses a traditional, institutional mechanism for the protection and management of forests. Different aspects of forest resource use are regulated through various mechanisms, which have become institutionalised within the specificities of the socio-political context of the village and which have either been handed down from generation to generation or introduced in more recent times.

While the *piral* harvest, as discussed above, is managed through a highly informal mechanism that exclusively involves women, the conservation of *thapala* forest above the village is carried out under a community land grant system under which a poor village *Kami* is given a plot of land at the forest fringe in return for his services as a forest guard.

This land grant system, while far from being a traditional institution in the village, had been initiated after the landslide and flood occurred. The number of such grantees and watchmen increased in ensuing years in order to provide jobs to the otherwise landless *Kami*.

There is a separate institution called *ban naralo* for the protection of the grassy slopes in order to grow nutritious fodder for livestock. The *ban naralo* is appointed every year. Either a new person is given the job or the incumbent himself is reappointed, if the latter's performance has been satisfactory to the villagers. As discussed in the chapter on livestock, the grassy slopes near the village have to be protected during the two monsoon months (the first of *Shrawan* to the end of *Bhadra*). During this time, the livestock are taken to higher pastures, away from the village. The *ban naralo* is expected to make sure that these protected areas, from which villagers later harvest fodder grasses, remain untrespassed. For this service the *ban naralo* is paid in-kind at the rate of five *lara* (a bunch of grass tied into a knot and held within two palms) of grass per household.

In the past, as discussed earlier, before important highland pastures were taken over by the National Park, the livestock went to graze on these pastures for longer periods and the local grasslands remained protected for a month longer than at present, i.e., until the end of *Aswin* (mid-October). Therefore, the households could reap a better harvest of fodder grass.

The local people have traditionally identified different forests as "Winter" and "Ashoje" (i.e., used during the months straddling the month of *Aswin*, also called *Ashoj*) forests for the purpose of properly regulating the movement of livestock. While the former are closer to home and are used during the winter months, generally from *Kartik* to *Baisakh*, the livestock are taken to the latter situated at higher altitudes during the warmer months. The movement of livestock is regulated to ensure that they avoid nearby grassy slopes during the two months of *Shrawan* and *Bhadra*.

### **Government Intervention and Local Forest Practice - Its Promotional Posture**

Government intervention for the conservation and growth of forests has come in two forms, promotional and restrictive. The Community Forestry Project was started in the area andm, about a decade ago, committees were constituted for the then so-called *Panchayat* Protected Forest by bringing the local forests under its jurisdiction. It was a two-tiered committee, the first and the main committee was constituted under the leadership of a local, progressive leftist belonging to the

middle class. A supervising committee was also constituted under the leadership of a village elite to oversee the activities of the main committee.

In addition to these, an exclusively female committee was also formed under the joint leadership of a well-respected and articulate local woman who was the wife of one of the local elites. Similarly, other young women from different *bado*, including *kamsel*, were also inducted as committee members. This committee had to supervise forest management, including the opening of forests for the collection of *piral*.

The women's committee has been anything but functional, since the death of its president a few years previously. However, transfer of power from the traditional centre, which, in this particular case, happens to be represented by the women of one of the richest and politically most significant households in the community, is highly unlikely, as shown by the *piral* collection decision-making mentioned above.

Similarly, other committees too have been hardly more effective. In one of the early meetings of the committee, it had been decided that the livestock should be kept away from the grasslands for three months between *Shrawan* and *Aswin* and should be allowed to come back only from the first of *Kartik*, but this decision was not followed through. The cattle graze on the grasslands soon after the first of *Aswin* and the committee has taken no action. In fact, it has not even met for a long time.

The attitude of the village elite on the so-called supervision committee has, at best, been lukewarm. While he does not want to be seen to be not cooperating with the president of the committee, he certainly does not approve of formalised power-sharing in a situation in which his economic prowess, combined with the large size of his household and his ability to pull strings in the district capital, make him the acknowledged arbiter, despite the resentment of his rivals in the community.

This tradition of allocating power in the community exists as a legacy of the *talukdar* system under which a revenue official, called a *mukhiya*, was locally appointed by the Government, in predominantly unirrigated areas (Regmi 1978: 126), to perform a number of

administrative and judicial functions within his area. These also include the management of forests and the issuance of permits to fell trees for building houses and making ploughs. While this office was abolished in most of the districts in the country following cadastral surveys, it continues to exist in a few, including Jumla, where such a survey has not been carried out. However, its non-revenue powers had long been overshadowed by the elective office of the *Pradhan Pancha*, created under the erstwhile *Panchayat* system. One of the village elite in Diyargaon mentioned above had enjoyed this office for more than two decades.

In its promotional role, the Government has, with the assistance of Canada's Rural Development Project, also set up forest nurseries in which local people are employed. But the people contend that their services would be better used in the protection of local forests than in running nurseries, because, whereas the nursery plants do not survive, effective protection of a forest area allows for the self-regeneration and growth of plants.

### Government's Restrictive Posture

The Government also established a sub-district forest office some years ago in a village about two hours' walk downstream. This office also has jurisdiction over Diyargaon. While this office does perform the above-mentioned promotional functions, it is, however, known better locally in its restrictive role. Technically, people have to obtain permission from the office to cut trees for building houses, etc. This permission is obtained by paying approximately eight to nine hundred rupees as fees.

Since the local carpenters, the *Od Kami*, use an axe instead of a saw to make beams, lintels, etc, they invariably end up using more trees than the 50 cubic feet allowed for a house. The forest officials know this very well and, allegedly, turn a blind eye, for a price. The forest officials have a notorious reputation among the local people. They compare them to a funeral priest who tells himself "I have nineteen cows now and, if one more were to die, I would have twenty". (This means that if one more of his *jajaman* [clients] were to die, the cow that would be received as a funeral gift would increase his herd to twenty.) Apparently the forest officials pass through the villages in search of bribes.

It is said that, in the past, during the hey-day of the *talukdar* system, people obtained permission from him to cut only dead or fallen trees and the good trees were left alone. But these days, since permission is procured with such large sums of money, they cut down the good trees causing even further damage to the forest.

Although the forest officials are not always that lucky, it, however, does not mean that trees are not being felled. They are; not only for the wood to repair houses or build new ones, but also to obtain the cores from the bottom part of pine trees trunks which are cut into tiny pieces and used as lamps or torches at night.

However, people generally agree that the restrictions imposed by the Government do have some positive effects because people are more circumspect about felling trees, thus discouraging the wanton destruction of forests.

### **Local Management of Forests as an Option**

People perceive local control and management as the only viable option for the conservation and proper exploitation of local forests. They cite the examples of the *thapala* forest above the village, which they have been protecting, and the one beyond *thapala* to the east to which they have stopped setting fire for over ten years now. They have also tried to enlist the support of the government forest office by formally requesting it not to issue permits to cut trees from the former. While the forest office has complied with their request for many years now, the people too are determined that, should somebody show up with a permit, they would force him to return empty handed.

The villagers also recall the teachings of their ancestors that forests help rainfall and prevent cold winds from blowing directly into paddy crops, a factor that affects maturation. They realise that the traditional wisdom regarding forests is fully consistent with the good forest management practices which are being advocated.

Ironically, despite this knowledge and despite also the fact that they had sought identical cooperation from the forest office for the forest across the river, today it is being rapidly depleted. It is properly protected neither by the Government nor by the people. A number of years ago, the forest was set on fire by a culprit from a neighbouring

village, but it is claimed that the forest official let him go in exchange for a bribe of six thousand rupees.

The villagers themselves use the forest extensively for timber and firewood supplies and, for the latter, they also share with some households from a neighbouring village. Some of the villagers suspect, as mentioned earlier, that one of the Diyargaon elites has already had it registered in his name and that, with an irrigation canal passing through it, he is quietly encouraging exploitation of its lower fringes so as to be able to turn it into a *jjula* holding.

But the villagers also have a common and important stake in the forest, namely, the twice yearly supply of *piral* which is essential for livestock and fertilisers. The attitude of the villagers towards this forest has been one of ambivalence, and they seek assurance in the fact that the younger pine trees are more numerous and that pine is a fast growing species.

The villagers also realise that a neighbouring village is encroaching upon another forest area from where the people of Diyargaon also collect firewood and *piral*. But given the fact that exclusive ownership rights of the communities over specific forests have not been a part of the local tradition, no restrictive action is contemplated by the villagers. This indifference is probably encouraged also by the fact that there is still another large area of forest from which they could collect a seemingly interminable supply of timber, firewood, and *piral*. It is presently inaccessible, but the construction of a bridge over the Hima River will provide access.

### **A Typology for User Group Forestry**

A few conclusions can be arrived at based on the understanding of the socioeconomic forces that shaped the forest management in Diyargaon. Firstly, it has been seen that where the forest in question directly affects the existence of the local people, as in the case of the Thapala forest to the north of the village, the villagers take no chance on its protection. The entire community power structure and resources are adequately mobilised not only to establish an indigenous system of forest protection and conservation but also to ward off the possible claimants from both within the village and outside. Similar has been their interest in the conservation of the forest area in the north-east,

which they have long ago ceased to burn. From there, they can gather not only good grass for their livestock at present but also a more abundant supply of timber, firewood, and pine needles in the future.

Regarding the gradual depletion in the lower fringes of the forest across the river, instigated apparently by one elite household interested in clearing the area for cultivation, people are already beginning to voice their concern, although in a subdued manner as yet. The forest is far too useful for the entire village as an important source of firewood, timber, and *piral*. It is, therefore, unlikely that the forest will be allowed to be totally cleared for cultivation by them.

Secondly, the case of the forest farther away from the village tells a different story altogether. It has been the area that bore the brunt of the population increase in the village by being subjected to sustained clearing to make room for more cultivable land. That the limits have been reached for such expansion is very much in evidence by the extent of cultivated land in most of the high altitude mountain ranges in the region. The accelerated growth in population has already wrought havoc on the forests in such an ecologically sensitive area. But this has not been a matter of concern for most local people. Survival of human beings has obvious priority over the survival of the trees in this region.

Thirdly, although informal institutional arrangements can be quite effective, as in the case of the *piral* harvest, the participation of the economic and political elites is essential to lend them the necessary legitimacy. Given the highly traditional, economically stratified social structure, the successful introduction of egalitarian democratic norms in the management of local institutions will take some time. If sustained and more encompassing interventions, designed to bring about transformation in the social structure, are not contemplated, then the two elements necessary for the formation of effective user groups in Diyargaon's traditional context are (i) informality in composition and (ii) elite participation.

Fourthly, even though such an arrangement exposes the institutions to the risk of exploitation by village elites, this is still preferable to relying on the government bureaucracy. As is evident in Diyargaon's experience, the government forest office has played a part only in the formation of two forest committees, one male and one female (and this was probably to fulfill its annual target), and no subsequent support

has ever come from it. The contact with the villagers seems to be more "sustained", where the forest officials stand a good chance of extorting some precious rupees from the villagers.

Lastly, people acknowledge that the existence of the government officials in the vicinity has proven to be a fairly effective deterrent against indiscriminate felling of trees in the upper reaches of the region where people have not been interested in conserving the forest. This situation, in turn, suggests a principle of mutual complementarity based on which the jurisdiction of the participatory local bodies vis-à-vis that of the government offices can be demarcated: in the immediate environs of the villages the local communities are unparalleled in their effectiveness in the conservation and management of local forests; in the outer reaches the Government should continue to retain its authority and responsibility.

Given these realities, the traditional forest management systems of Diyargaon are more functional when they share a symbiotic relationship with the forests around. In such cases, the villagers as a community know exactly what they need to achieve in terms of protecting the forest on the ridge or collecting fodder grass (goal setting). They also mobilise resources and implement their goals by either making grants to poor *Kami* or by paying the *ban naralo* in bundles of fodder grass. In addition, the *ban naralo* can be replaced, as are other *naralo* or *kumthel*, on the basis of his work performance (evaluation). Thus, these traditional mechanisms, however informal they may be, possess the basic attributes of effective institutions in that they set goals, mobilise resources in a sustainable manner, implement plans, and evaluate the results on a regular basis.

In order to strengthen local user groups and make the leaders more accountable to their members, sustained external support in terms of training the members in more scientific and transparent methods of management and in facilitating intra-group and inter-group communication (including exchange of experiences) would be needed. However, the normal government bureaucracy is ill-equipped to render these services effectively, and more so in a remote location like Diyargaon. Therefore, this is a function that the private sector may be able to discharge more effectively.

Furthermore, where such a symbiotic relationship is wanting between a given community and the forests in the area, as in the case of the

highland forests in the region of Diyargaon, reliance on community user groups would be ineffective. The symbiotic relationship of the forests in the upper mountain reaches of Karnali exists not with the villages in the immediate area but with the regions much further downstream in the plains which can be devastated, not by the depletion of timber and firewood supplies there but by the massive unleashing of landslides that such deforestation would inevitably precipitate. Therefore, despite its immense limitations the government forest bureaucracy will have to continue to protect them.

## CHAPTER 4

# Trade and Migration

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Despite the remoteness of the Karnali Zone, intra- and inter-regional trade have all along been integral parts of its economy. As early as the twelfth century A.D., trading between western Nepal and Tibet was firmly established under the western Malla Kingdom. While salt, wool, animals, and other goods of Tibetan and Chinese origin flowed southwards, food grains and other items of Nepalese or Indian origin flowed northwards (Bishop 1990: 300).

The limited range of goods and services produced locally resulted in what Bishop (1990: 158) called a "symbiotic exchange" between different 'niche' and altitudinal belts becoming an ecological necessity. Thus, the people of Diyargaon, like their neighbours, have engaged in barter and trade for generations, linked in a complex network of economic and social relationships with people from areas like Mugu and Humla to the north and the border towns to the south.

This economic network has traditionally involved a three-way movement of people and goods. The border people in the north, primarily the *Mugal Bhotia* of Mugu district, specialise in Trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet and import salt, wool, woollen products, animals, and other Chinese consumer goods and move through the

lower Karnali villages, including Diyargaon, with the help of horses, yaks, and the latter's cross-breeds, bartering (or selling for cash) goods in exchange for foodgrains, mostly rice, which are exported to Tibet (Shrestha 1971: 56-57).

The *Mugali* traders have lately extended their area of operations to include the northernmost village of Limi in Humla district where they buy wooden bowls for export to Tibet. They also visit the mountain districts of Dolpa and Baglung where they sell sheep and goats from Tibet, and then they move on to Kathmandu to buy watches and electronic goods, such as radios and tape recorders, for export to Tibet. Nevertheless, they complain of bad times because these days they do not make more than one hundred per cent profit, unlike the two hundred per cent profit realised in the past.

Similarly, the *Khas* from highland villages, who have large herds of sheep and goats, also trade with the northern areas and the southern town of Surkhet. They deal mainly in grains and Indian salt.

The people from the river valleys, such as Diyargaon, in turn, without the help of bovines, ovines, or equines, travelled between Humla and the Tibetan border market of Taklakot in the north, the trading post of Joljibee on the western border of Nepal, and the southern border markets of Nepalganj, Rajapur, and Dang. They exported mainly horses, herbs, and woollen products and imported consumer goods such as clothes, yarn, utensils, and condiments. Most of these exchanges were conducted through the immense network of the indigenous institution of *ista* which spread over the entire zone and beyond.

However, while the limited changes in the transportation network in the region and outside provided new directions and opportunities for trade, population growth with a limited resource base created its own pressures on the local economy. Consequently, expanded seasonal and long-term migrations and extended extra-regional trading became increasingly indispensable components of the subsistence system for a majority of the local population.

### **Extent of Seasonal Migration for Trading and Manual Work**

Trading trips and seasonal migration are coordinated with the annual agricultural calendar, in that they occur mostly between the months

of *Mangsir* and *Magh* when there is little agricultural activity that require men's labour or presence. Therefore, most able-bodied men leave the village to engage in large-scale trading, small-time trading in Indian villages, or work as labourers in the remote areas of northern India. Of the three possibilities, the first one requires the capability to invest and the second, good salesmanship.

The number of people in the sample who left the village during the winter of 2047 (1990-91) is given in Table 18.

**Table 18: No. of People on Trading or Working Trips in 2047**

| <i>Bado</i>    | Sample households | Households with people leaving the village | No. of persons engaged |
|----------------|-------------------|--|------------------------|
| <i>Bahun</i>   | 10                | 4  | 5                      |
| Jachauri       | 8                 | 5  | 6                      |
| <i>Od Kami</i> | 9                 | 6  | 6                      |
| <i>Sarki</i>   | 9                 | 6  | 7                      |
| <i>Dhobi</i>   | 6                 | 4  | 4                      |
| <i>Total</i>   | 42                | 25   | 28                     |

Source: Field Study

Most able-bodied men and youngsters leave the village during winter, unless they are hindered by compelling reasons. Of the men from the sample who stayed back, two from *Bahun bado* had regular government jobs in the village. Others did not go because they were either too old to take the rigour of the journey and task, or were too young to venture out, or had young and female children to take care of in the household. Other reasons included the death of a parent, or recent separation from a brother, or the need to have a house built that very winter.

However, there are also two or three families in the village whose destitution, resulting from paucity of landholdings, forces them to lock their house and bring their wives and young children too to the warmer southern town of Surkhet to do odd jobs. Food is much cheaper there and scant clothing and bare feet are not uncomfortable in Surkhet's warm climate.

## Destinations, Purposes, and Wares in the Past

While trading and migration have all along been integral components of Diyargaon's household economy, the changes that have taken place in the village and its surroundings have had concomitant effects on the trading pattern. The people who engaged in these pursuits could be classified into three broad categories, namely, those who traded seriously, those who masqueraded as healers, and those who migrated seasonally for manual work.

Traders sold or bartered a range of local products which generally included horses; medicinal herbs; woollen goods, such as sweaters and shawls; and, occasionally, yak tails, musk, turpentine, wax, and a geological product called *shilajeet* - a sticky black hydrocarbon similar to tar - that oozes out from rock outcrops and is used in ayurvedic medicine and as an aphrodisiac (Bishop 1990: 278). Much of these wares were obtained in Humla where local traders went to sell Indian products, mainly clothes.

Regarding horse-trading, in the past, the *Byansi*, a people from Darchula district in the west, came to Jumla to buy horses which were sold at the eight-day fair in the Joljibee border mart. But three generations ago, an enterprising man from Diyargaon decided to follow the *Byansi* to Joljibee and, ever since, the local traders have travelled to the fair themselves.

On trading trips, the traders carried most of the goods and also hired local porters. The herbs were sold in towns along the Indo-Nepal border, such as Nepalganj, Bishunpur, Koilabas, and Balarampur, and horses and shawls were marketed primarily in Joljibee in the west and the *Terai* towns of Butwal, Dang, and Deokhuri in the south. They did not travel to India.

There were other villagers who also needed the kind of income to be made from such seasonal trips, but they did not have the required capital. Their inventory included articles like fake musk, oil extracted from the trunk of the deodar tree, and a white geological substance called *toro*, which was scraped off the mountain sides and which expanded in the heat. These people travelled to Nepali and Indian villages selling these items as remedies for a number of ailments that the plains' villagers suffered from.

The fake musk was sold as a talisman which, on being kept inside a paddy heap overnight, greatly increased in quantity. The deodar oil was sold or exchanged in small quantities, for grain, as medication for "cooling one's body" or for curing aches. But the *toro* itself was sold in precious little pinches as (dried) tiger's milk, useful for driving off the evil spirits that tormented the village children. In one case, a *Jumli* "healer" even custom-tailored a leopard skin on a monkey and released it with a small bell hanging from its neck as a remedy against infestation of its too numerous brethren in a religious settlement in India.

These are some examples of the infinite number of "remedies" that the *Jumli* were capable of selling as they moved from one village to another in the region. Payment for these would be in small amounts of cash and grain. While they used the latter for sustenance, they would save a few rupees from the former to pay land taxes back home, and the remainder would be used for buying essential household supplies such as clothing and condiments.

Some people, mostly from the *kamsel* castes, preferred to go to the remote regions of north India, such as Nainital, Bhimtal, Ranikhet, Almora, Hardwar, Pithoragarh, and the like, in search of manual work which required no capital, was more in line with what they traditionally did in their home villages, and provided them with a more stable source of income than the occupation of an itinerant small time "trader".

The *kamsel* migrants worked on varied jobs such as building roads, constructing houses, felling trees, carrying stones, digging earth, loading and unloading vehicles, or otherwise working as *coolies*. Most spent the winter months between *Mangsir* and *Falgun* in India and returned home at the latest by early *Chaitra* for the new cycle of agricultural work. But some would stay on for a few years in a row saving up some money before returning home.

### **Forces of Change in the Trade Regime**

Certain changes in the infrastructure of the region, coupled with the increased pressure of population on local resources, and the greater diligence with which they apply themselves to conducting business in Indian villages, among others, have brought about some basic

alterations in the patterns of trade and migration of the people of Diyargaon.

After Humla was included in the Royal Nepal Airlines' network in the late seventies and local traders began to import clothes by air, it was no longer possible for traders from Diyargaon to compete, because their merchandise was priced higher due to the portorage involved in the process of walking from a southern border town to the most remote northern district. The abrupt end to their near-monopoly in the cloth trade not only deprived them of the one hundred per cent profit they made on their investments, it also ended their long-standing practice of buying local woollen products and medicinal herbs for export to the southern border towns. Presently, there is only one trader from Diyargaon who still goes to Humla and Mugu to set up wayside stores and sell homespun clothes imported by air from the textile village of Lubu in the Kathmandu Valley.

The other important factor that restricted export was the establishment of two police posts on the trail to Surkhet, one in Jumla and the other in Kalikot district. The police, for unexplained reasons, harassed and forbade the traders from bringing medicinal herbs with them, and even those who brought oil extracted from the *Deodar* tree were taken into custody.

Thus, the only trade that has been continued is the export of horses through Joljibee trading post on the western border where Indian traders buy them to resell in the remote mountainous hinterlands of India. Until some twenty years ago, approximately five thousand horses were sold during the eight-day fair in early *Mangsir*. But, with the increasing cost of horses and the expansion of road networks in India, the number offered for sale has now declined to some eighteen hundred horses per year.

In Diyargaon itself, three horse traders have been going to the fair, including a major one who brought twenty horses. However, a certain amount of trickery is involved in horse-trading. Some good-looking horses are sold for inflated prices by advertising them as those rode by the District President or Member of Parliament from Jumla. But this is not the only type of trade trick. Not all of the horses offered for sale are bred in Diyargaon. Most of them are bought on credit from wayside villages as the traders pass through on their way to the trade mart. On the way back, the trader complains of having incurred a loss

on the horses and pays the owners mostly in carpets bought in Joljibee, inflating the prices, of course, in the process.

Despite such profiteering, the end for horse trading too, is in sight. A couple of years ago, the traders were surprised to find the fairground in Joljibee ploughed by the local people and under standing crops, another instance of population growth. But after a scuffle in which their tents and utensils were thrown out by the local people, and during which the *Jumli* traders let their horses graze on the crops, the Chief District Officer negotiated a settlement whereby the trade mart would remain unploughed up to the eighth of *Mangsir* every year. However, the major horse trader from Diyargaon, given his advancing age, has decided to retire after a year or two.

### The Current Trading Pattern

As is evident from the preceding discussions, changes have been brought about in the trading pattern by forces beyond the control of the villagers. But migration and trade are necessary because the agricultural resource base is simply too inadequate to make ends meet for most people.

Bereft of what little geographical advantage they had in terms of exporting local products, the current trading pattern is now entirely dependent on the only remaining asset - artfulness. Most people today bring cash from the village - their own or borrowed for exorbitant interest rates - in different amounts, from 150 rupees to about a thousand for the journey. Those carrying smaller amounts supplement their capital by borrowing from one of the four *baniya* (shopkeepers) in Nepalganj who have had long standing business relationships with these clients from the Karnali Zone.

The seasonal migrants invariably travel to the town of Gorakhpur in India by rail. There they purchase a kilogramme or two of the lowest grade of asafoetida at Indian Rs 20/kg. They move through the Indian villages in small groups of two or three, loudly peddling their ware as something that came from the great big trees of the mountains and a sure remedy against fever and measles and as giving cooling comfort to little children. This same asafoetida is stored in two different pockets, or containers, of the trader to satisfy the needs of a

discriminating buyer. If the latter is dissatisfied with the quality of the spice from one pocket, he is offered the merchandise from the other pocket for a higher price.

There are three grades of asafoetida, costing 80, 40, and 20 rupees per kg. The latter two will be pre-adulterated with flour by the seller himself. If the visiting trader intends to peddle his goods in an urban area, he uses the best of the three grades.

The asafoetida is sold in *tola* (11 gram = one *tola*) for cash or foodgrains. While the latter is useful for sustenance (vegetables are obtained for free), they can make a cash profit of about four times the principal in one sale, and this lasts for about a week.

After a run or two in asafoetida trading and the resulting enhanced capital accumulation, they replace their merchandise by going for synthetic sweaters that are manufactured in Ludhiana in the Punjab but which are locally bought in Gorakhpur. The sweaters are often marketed in rural areas as "handwoven woollens from the mountains". They lure the buyers in broken Hindi by tempting them to "wear this and be like Mithun (meaning Mithun Chakravarty, a popular Hindi cine star), "wear this on a bicycle and be a hero", or "wear this to an invitation and be better received". They regret that they do not know Hindi better.

The more enterprising ones also market hats (woollen padded on the outside), shawls, and blankets in Uttar Pradesh. Shawls and blankets are marketed as genuine goods from Kashmir. They are skilled salesmen, have the knack of maintaining sustained contact with customers, and make repeated trips to the latter.

There are still others who adhere to the profitability of traditional trickery. This has to do with the selling of *shilajeet* in India. Although the export of this geological product is prohibited, the imaginative traders from Jumla still persist in satisfying the strong demands for it in India. As they proceed with their journey to India, they manage to smuggle with them a small piece of this black and hard natural product. Once in Gorakhpur, however, they buy a kilogramme or so of sugar and boil it hard to produce a dark and thick concentration which, once dried into small uneven pieces, compares favourably with the genuine *shilajeet*, both in colour and shape, and can be sold to the trusting villagers of Uttar Pradesh.

The transaction begins with the holding of a demonstration to establish the genuineness of their ware in which, first, the piece of real *shilajeet* is shown as the fake version and, to prove the point, is dropped in a glass of water in front of the curious on-lookers. As explained, nothing special happens; it just sinks to the bottom of the water. It proves beyond doubt that the stuff is devoid of any of the much-heralded powers of *shilajeet*. Then they pull out a small piece of their new invention, the sugar "shilajeet" and subject it to the rigours of the same test by dropping it in the water. But, this time, because of the inherent porousness of the material involved, it leaves a visible and sparkling trail of bubbles behind as it sinks downwards. The buyers are sufficiently impressed, and the sales are transacted forthwith.

By the end of the three-months' sojourn, each trader will make quite a substantial profit. For example, two brothers, who had set out with 500 Nepalese rupees, amassed a sum of 1,800 Indian rupees or about 3,000 Nepalese rupees after three rounds of trade lasting three months. Similarly, another person with 1,500 rupees made, after three months, a fortune of 4,000 Indian rupees equivalent to almost 7,000 Nepalese rupees.

Their calculations include not only the actual cash profit made but also the foodgrains saved at home while spending three long months in India.

### Trading versus Manual Labour

There are a number of households in the village which, as stated earlier, send their able-bodied men and boys to remote places in northern India, west of Nepal, to spend three to four winter months working in various manual jobs. Apart from those who occasionally fall victim to fraudulent contractors, the rest earn about a thousand to one thousand five hundred Indian rupees during the period, and they use this to purchase annual supplies for their homes.

Since manual labour has been their traditional occupation, most men in the *kamsel* castes of *Kami*, *Sarki*, and *Damai* travel to northern India to perform manual jobs during the winter, although a *chokha* or two have also been known to accompany them to do the same. About four *Damai* families have even settled there permanently over the

decades and two families have been there for over a year. Occasionally, one would learn of a man or two who had gone to India for a number of years and from whom the relatives had not heard.

More recently, a definite shift has taken place in the pattern in favour of trade and away from manual jobs, although a number of people have also wavered between the two vocations. Today, most *Sarki* are engaged in trading, which the elderly *Kami* too find physically less demanding than building houses.

For the people of Diyargaon, trading today is a more attractive proposition, especially for those with some sense of enterprise. It is physically less arduous and, with some luck, they make very handsome profits in addition to living quite luxuriously by indulging in "such delicacies as eggs and *jilebis* (a confectioner's preparation of sugar and butter)" while in India.

In one case, some three years ago, a person borrowed two hundred rupees and left the village. Of this, he used 100 rupees for travel expenses and another 100 as initial capital. He ended up earning a colossal sum of 14 thousand Indian rupees in five months. During the time spent he had graduated from trading in asafoetida to sweaters and then finally to blankets. The lender too was quite happy, not only because of the prompt repayment of the loan but also because of the generous gifts of a canister full of mustard oil (about five litres), a steel plate, and a *panyu* (a large spoon) for the kitchen, all of them costing far more than the principal sum but given in gratitude.

However, not all goes well with these trading trips. Many complain that only "two out of ten" are good people in India. Many look down upon them as having come to India for want of food in their own country. Many take the asafoetida free of cost on the pretext of sampling it. Sometimes, they have to face the problem of pickpockets and they might even fall prey to robbers. Some traders simply detest having to lie and to, sometimes, even swear by one's mother and children.

On the way home, they have to travel through a place called Dillikot in the Kalikot district of Nepal, and this is very hazardous because some people in the locality regularly rob them, mostly at night. Over the decades, however, they have also developed defense mechanisms. To start with, they always move in groups - small ones in India - on

peddling trips through villages, and large ones while trekking back home. In India, they hide their money by sewing it inside a quilt. Once when a small party fell into a robbers' trap while smuggling Indian goods into Nepal through a wrong border point, one of them still managed to sneak away and give the police an instantly fabricated account of the incident claiming the dacoits had robbed them of 14 thousand rupees in cash. The police immediately swung into action and coerced the robbers to return the alleged sum of which the police kept eight thousand and the *Jumli* victims made off with the rest as well as their belongings.

### Returns from Working and Trading Trips

Apart from a handful of households that are engaged in trading for profit, all the people in Diyargaon who migrate seasonally for trading, or manual jobs, do so to meet the essential household needs for which they would otherwise lack resources. After having earned what they could in India, they stop in Nepalganj to buy their necessities from those shopkeepers from whom they either have borrowed their initial capital or with whom they traditionally transact.

It is not by accident that the migrants work in India but come back to Nepalganj to buy their household supplies. The first reason is, of course, their loyalty to these lending shopkeepers. Secondly, it is the Nepalese custom officials who customarily harass these small time traders. It is said that duties are levied even on the clothes worn by them if they look new.

When it comes to clothing, however, there is an added incentive to buy in Nepalganj. With the construction of the east-west highway, many *Jumli* traders, after coming back from India, make another trip to Kathmandu to buy a stock of garments, either imported from Bangkok or locally manufactured, which have become fashionable more recently also with the youth of Jumla. They then return to Nepalganj to set up store in the Bageswari temple premises for a few days to sell them to other returning fellow *Jumli* before they themselves head home.

In order to capitalise on this market, some of the *Damai* from Diyargaon also go to Nepalganj with their sewing machines so that they can make dresses for their *Jumli* clients. A recent trend is to wear new outfits, such as pants, and, as far possible, to have them

tailored in Nepalganj. Whatever the source of supply, a normal inventory of purchases by such returnees consists of garments for family members, shoes, occasionally a coat, *patuka* (a wide cloth tied around the waist by women), vermilion, fabrics, bangles, ribbons, socks, oil, spices, sugar, utensils, soap, blankets, and sweaters. Depending upon the immediate income and economic status of the households, this package can be big or small. But if one is swindled by a fraudulent contractor in the Indian mountains one could end up coming home with a newly-purchased but empty box.

Those who stay in the village perform odd jobs, such as building houses and making storage bins and leather articles, depending upon their caste. The income derived from the sources is used to purchase their minimum necessities from returnees. Some rely on their *ista* to bring them the necessary supplies, for which they pay in advance. However, even without advance payment, some returnees do bring gifts, mostly spices and sugar, for their *ista* who invariably might have given them a departing gift of foodgrains or walnuts (believed to bring good luck to the traveller).

### **Seasonal Migration: An Indispensable Safety Valve**

As is evident from the preceding discussions, seasonal migration and trading occupy a very important place in the life and economy of the people of Diyargaon, as elsewhere in the zone. They recall that previous visits were limited to the markets of Nepalganj and only a few made it across the border. But, today, many people migrate to India. They acknowledge that actually their trade just amounts to going there "to be fed". "We do not represent anything more than the bread and clothing we earn in a foreign country". So heavy is the dependence on it that "even a boy of five or six now accompanies the father".

Seasonal migration to India for trade and work is acting as a safety valve for the limitations of the local economy. Even during the Indian embargo against Nepal in 1989/90 (2046), thirteen persons from an equal number of households risked going to India, despite mistreatment and insults at the border and in the railway trains. In the case of one migrant, when he was stopped at the border near an Indian checkpost, he was suddenly haunted by the spectre of having to trek back home empty-handed with all its adverse consequences for

him and his family. He was too desperate not to enter India. So he decided to take whatever the risk and made a dash across the border.

### **Mushroom Gathering: A New Opportunity**

About eight years ago, one person, returning home after having worked in India for about twenty years, brought along wild mushrooms *marcela* (found in Kashmir) which were valued as an aphrodisiac and sold in Delhi for a very high price. In the beginning, he kept it to himself and made lots of money by assigning people to collect them in the local mountains, after which he exported them to Delhi. Soon it became public knowledge. Today, there are a large number of traders from different villages in the valley who buy the wild mushrooms from the thousands of men, women, and children who collect them during the two spring months of *Baisakh* and *Jestha*. These wild mushrooms were once eaten only by the *kamsel* and not even touched by the *chokha*. It is said that a kilogramme of the dried plant fetches nineteen hundred rupees in Indian currency which means that even one plant earns a rupee or two for the collector. Because of this valuable find, some people sum up the future prospects for a *Jumli* as lying in *chyau*, *syau*, and *hyau* which translated into English means mushrooms, apples, and enterprise respectively.

to transform the traditional forces that continue to shape its structure and character.

### **The Political Structure of the Village**

As a result of the continuation of the *talukdar* system discussed earlier, the political structure of the village has remained bipolar in that the local *mukhya* continues to exercise considerable power by virtue of his duties, namely, collecting land taxes and certifying and attesting land deeds. He is dreaded mostly because of his status

## CHAPTER 5

# Village Politics

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The historical legacy of orthodox Hinduism in terms of stratified social structure and caste segregation, an exploitative economic structure, and uneven resource distribution has continued to define the politics in Diyargaon. While the political structure has, over the decades, evolved along with other changes taking place in Diyargaon's life and economy, it has primarily been conditioned by the two elements of population growth and a dwindling resource base. Although the principles and ideology of the larger national political system and changes therein have also influenced the mode of politics in the village, their democratic and egalitarian impact have not been strong enough to transform the traditional forces that continue to shape its inherent structure and character.

### The Political Structure of the Village

As a result of the continuation of the *talukdar* system discussed earlier, the political structure of the village has remained bipolar in that the local *mukhiya* continues to exercise considerable power by virtue of his duties, namely, collecting land taxes and certifying and recommending land deeds. He is dreaded mostly because of his misuse

of this authority, for example, withholding of tax receipts, appropriating other's land for himself or for somebody else for a bribe, refusing to authenticate or issue certificates of inheritance and transfer of property, and these services are rendered only upon the extortion of money and free labour from his illiterate and poor tax payers.

The *mukhiya* also performed many regulatory functions in the past as the government-nominated village chief. These included authorising the felling of trees for building houses or for making ploughs and clearing land for agriculture, among others.

But, after the introduction of elective local government bodies in the early fifties and their reinforcement during the erstwhile partyless *Panchayat* System in the sixties and seventies, the regulatory functions were effectively transferred to the president of the village *panchayat*, the *Pradhan Pancha*, who was elected from the entire *panchayat* area based on adult suffrage, and, for all practical purposes, emerged as the principal representative of the Government and as the village decision-maker.

The area of the then village *panchayat*, of which Diyargaon is a part, consisted of nine wards and several villages, including two at higher altitudes inhabited by the *Khas* people. Twenty years ago, Diyargaon represented three wards, including one segregated ward which consisted of three non-contiguous *kamsel bado*. Currently it consists of only two secular wards. Of the other wards, the two high altitude villages consist of five wards, representing a total of 685 voters or some 47 per cent of the total voters (1,413).

After the abolition of the *Panchayat* System, the village *panchayat* has been renamed the Village Development Committee. The secretary of the Village Development Committee of Diyargaon is a government official, a non-local person domiciled in the district who is mostly absent from meetings.

The basis for the increased legitimacy and power of the elected head of the village is the wide range of functions entrusted to the village *panchayat* through the legal statute of the Village *Panchayat* Act and its by-laws. While those powers and functions have steadily increased over the years, the statute of 1988 had provided for 115 different functions, covering eleven different areas, e.g., education and culture,

health and population, agriculture, irrigation and land reform, works and transport, forest, soil conservation and environmental protection, industry, commerce and tourism, fuel, social welfare, and *panchayat* and general administration (Ministry of Law and Justice 1988: 61-70). These broad functions have been retained more or less in the revised act for the establishment of Village Development Committees (Ministry of Law and Justice 1992: 9-12).

Although this list of functions was unrealistically lengthy, the village *panchayat* of Diyargaon did perform a large number of them. For instance, it built or renovated bridges, drinking water and irrigation systems, schools, trails, ponds, embankments, and temples. It also sought to introduce programmes in afforestation, health and sanitation, food security, livestock development, cottage industries, and apple cultivation. It even wanted a commercial bank and succeeded in getting a police post established in the vicinity.

The village *panchayat* also sent recommendations for many local projects to be included in the Seventh Five Year Plan, handled development grants given by the Government, formed and supervised user groups for project implementation, made preparations for the King's visit to the local temple, considered introducing vital registration laws in the village, and certified distances between places in the *panchayat* area for use by government officials in making their travel claims. They endorsed the code of conduct stipulated by the centre for *panchayat* members, supported central political bodies in the denunciation of terrorist activities in Kathmandu and elsewhere in the country, sometimes complained against corrupt officials in the district, wrote letters of recommendation for local citizens with business in government offices, arbitrated local disputes, and received visiting officials from the district capital and outside. In short, the jurisdiction of the *panchayat* and its officials was extensive, making the office of the *Pradhan Pancha* the most powerful and coveted position in the village.

### **The Village Political Base**

Although the office of the *Pradhan Pancha*, the centre of village politics, was an elective position based on adult suffrage, the choice was dictated more by the oppressive forces supporting the traditional village power structure than by free democratic forces.

To start with, the village was all along riddled with factions, based on a wide variety of considerations. Although caste is an important basis for mutual alliance, the *kamsel* are far too dependent on the *chokha* to organise themselves as a political force. Although intra-caste mutual sympathy and assistance do exist (such as a *Sarki* lending money to another free of interest), each of these individual *kamsel* households are too closely aligned economically to one or more *chokha* households and, therefore, too weak to build more aggressive solidarity among themselves.

It is, therefore, the *chokha* who (barring a few who are very poor) have the liberty and ability to indulge in village factionalism and politics. And they have many criteria. Since the inception of the village *panchayat* in the fifties, five *chokha* have become *Pradhan Pancha*, of whom four came from *Bahun bado* and one from Jachauri. Of the former four, two have held office only for one term each. The one from Jachauri held office only for a part of the term. The rest of the term was again shared by two brothers from a rich joint family in *Bahun bado* (*Bahun bado A*). Of them, the elder brother held the post for two successive terms and, after he was promoted to an even more important position in the district capital, the mantle, after a brief interlude during which it was filled by the person from Jachauri (Jachauri A), was passed on to the younger brother who kept it until the abolition of the *Panchayat* System in 1990, at which time the local *panchayat* was also disbanded.

Of the two earlier *Bahun bado Pradhan Pancha*, one held the post only briefly and was succeeded by the son of a local *talukdar* (we will call him *Bahun bado B*) whose tenure was marred by the same atrocities that characterised the term of his father. So the emergence of *Bahun bado A* as *Pradhan Pancha*, after being elected following a contest with the predecessor, was seen as a respite for the people. The story of Jachauri A, who is a self-made man and one of the wealthiest in *Jachauri bado*, is similar. Although a member of a different (and rival) caste, he was not only a close relative of *Bahun bado A* but also an important member of the latter's faction. However, when he found his long-cherished accession to power ending abruptly as a brief interlude, he became a sworn enemy of *Bahun bado A*. Thus, in the next election five years later, he contested the election, only to be badly beaten. The incumbent garnered more support from the constituent wards outside the village. The vote count was 853 against a mere 105 for Jachauri A.

The Jachauri *bado* people, although mostly of modest means or downright poor, have an inflated opinion of themselves as *Thakuri* having "royal" descent from the Kalyal kings of the *Baise* period. Thus, although they are very jealous of the economically more successful *Bahun bado* neighbours, they look down upon them because they are either *Bahun* who, although superior according to the Hindu caste system, were ruled by the *Thakuri* kings, or Hamal *Thakuri* who are of mixed parentage (*Bahun* father and *Thakuri* mother) and are, therefore, considered to be only marginal *Thakuri*. Thus, when it came to intra-village issues, the stand-off would invariably be between these two mutually opposed caste groups.

In the last *Panchayat* election five years ago, the voters in the highland villages, who until then had always managed to hold only the office of the Deputy *Pradhan Pancha* for themselves, wanted to contest the higher office. After having held the position for so many terms, the incumbent apparently found it hard to persuade his highland friends and supporters of many years not to contest the office, and, therefore, in a controversial move, he opted out of the fray.

Capitalising on this opportunity, the Jachauri aspirant decided to try his luck once again. In order to ensure the undivided support of the entire village against the possible contender from the highlands, a unity meeting was organised on his initiative and was also attended by the incumbent. The meeting itself was held under the auspices of *Bahun bado* B who, following the death of his father, had succeeded as the *talukdar* himself, and had continued to be at loggerheads with *Bahun bado* A. This arrangement was opted for to assure the total solidarity of all the factions in the village in favour of the new candidate.

As planned, a consensus was reached in the meeting that Jachauri A would be the sole candidate who, then, offered a goat for sacrifice on the occasion not only to celebrate the decision in his favour, by distributing small chunks of mutton to all the households in the village, but also to seal the pact by having everyone swear by the animal's sacrificial blood.

The highland villagers too, on their part, had counted on the support of *Bahun bado* B in their 'bid for the office against his antagonist incumbent. But when word of the agreement spread to the highland villages, they saw little possibility of winning against the totally

united force of the Diyargaon voters. However, in withdrawing from the race, they let it be known that they would rather support the candidature of the incumbent *Bahun bado A* than support the Jachauri.

With the majority of the highland voters on his side once again, the incumbent changed his mind and decided to re-enter the fray, irrespective of the consensus and the oath to which he, too, was a party. The Jachauri contestant suddenly saw the carpet removed from under his feet and, reminded of his ignominious defeat in the previous election, he decided to withdraw from the race. Most people viewed the incident as a master stroke on the part of *Bahun bado A*.

In the district itself, it was one of the rare uncontested elections for the post of *Pradhan Pancha*. The Jachauri candidate, having lost not only what was almost within his grasp but also having lost face and an expensive goat (for which, despite his claim, he was not compensated by the *Pradhan Pancha*), continues to nurse his wound and prepare for the next bout.

The factions, however, are not limited only to these two groups. In *Bahun bado* itself, a member of another wealthy family and a close relative of the clan (*Bahun bado C*), who had been a member of the in-group of *Bahun bado A* twenty years ago, has since become alienated because of similar competition. He had counted on the magnanimity of *Bahun Bado A* to share that coveted office by giving him a chance to preside over it.

Although it had been a partyless polity in the country during the pre-1990 period, underground party affiliations were rather widespread. In Diyargaon itself, *Bahun bado B* headed the Congress leadership in the village and had also been a district level Congress leader. Although A and B are closely related, they have been at odds for decades because of their comparable economic status, disagreement over misappropriation of the property of a heirless relative, the latter's defeat in the PP election in the early sixties at the hands of the former, and the latter's entry into the then opposing political force, the Congress Party.

Similarly, the head of still another *Bahun bado* household, a man of medium economic standing in the community, has been more or less a one-man faction representing a leftist splinter group called "*Rohit*"

and counted on the support of the *kamsel*, mainly the *Sarki*, to whom he has been occasionally helpful. But one of his brothers worked as an official in the local *panchayat* and was close to *Bahun bado A*. Another brother was an official in the Congress Party at the sub-district level. In sum, while political alliances have been quick in being forged and dissolved in Diyargaon, they have been based not so much on the understanding and convictions or differing ideologies as on the persistent tradition of inter-personal rivalry in the village.

### **Multiparty Politics and Village Factions**

With the disbandment of the *Panchayat* polity and the re-establishment of the multiparty system in 1990, the political parties once again became legal and functioned openly also in the villages. But this new situation turned out to be more useful as a formal, institutional device to accommodate the fluidity of widespread factionalism that characterised the village politics of Diyargaon.

Even before political parties became legal, most of the villagers in Jachauri under the leadership of Jachauri A had been solidly behind the Nepali Congress Party. But with the dissolution of the *Panchayat* System, and the reputation of the *ex-pancha* largely discredited in the eyes of the public, they too have been in search of a new identity. A large number of them thus joined the Congress Party, as did the *Bahun bado A* brothers too after some hesitation.

But this development upset the balance of factions in the community. While it did little in warming their relations with their long-time foe, *Bahun bado B* (who even saw this as a possible threat to his position as a Congress leader at the district level), Jachauri A, who had so far been quite active in Congress ranks and a sworn enemy of *Bahun bado A*, was outraged by their induction into his party. It was impossible for him to share the same political party with them. So he reacted by issuing a statement alleging that it was no longer appropriate for honest workers like him to continue as members of the Congress Party "because of the recent infiltration by corrupt elements". Then he crossed over to the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist-Leninists (CPN-UML), followed by almost all the households of Jachauri *bado*.

Similarly, one of the brothers of *Bahun bado D*, who, as mentioned above, was an official in the local *panchayat* for many years, and had

been close to *Bahun bado A*, had his own score to settle with the *talukdar* (*Bahun bado B*) who apparently had transferred the title in a land transaction concluded by the former only after he had been bribed with 500 rupees. So, when he found out that *Bahun bado A* had joined the Congress Party - the same party as *Bahun bado B* - he was furious and disappointed. Therefore, even at the cost of straining his cordial relationship with *Bahun bado A*, he decided to align himself with the Jachauri faction, becoming, in the process, one of its principal strategists.

Then there was *Bahun bado E*, a "Rohit" supporter, and his son, a "Marxist-Leninist". This, however, posed no problems in their aligning with the "partyless" leaders of *Bahun bado A*, for they were opposed to the Congress supporters of *Bahun bado B* and Jachauri A, although not necessarily for reasons of ideological conviction. *Bahun bado E*, himself, had cultivated some five *muri of jyula* claiming that it was his share of the inheritance from the heirless relative mentioned earlier. There were no papers to support his claim and *Bahun bado B*, the *talukdar* himself, had consistently disputed it, implying that he was the rightful recipient of this inheritance. However, *Bahun bado E* had the support of *Bahun bado A*, for the latter too had forcibly appropriated the rest of the inheritance without legal entitlement.

Therefore, in this stand off against *Bahun bado B*, the continued blessing of *Bahun bado A* was absolutely indispensable for *Bahun bado E*. Following *Bahun bado A*'s entry into the Congress Party, *Bahun bado E*, along with his son, suddenly became hard core supporters of the Congress Party.

*Bahun bado C* held different views regarding alignment to political parties. While he did not become a formal member of any party, he hoisted the election symbol of one of the *Panchayat*-leaning candidates who had been an opponent of *Bahun bado A* when the elder of the two brothers served in the district capital. But, at the same time, he was also in league with another contending '*Panchayat*' candidate. He represented the interests of both candidates in the village - for a price.

Thus, almost every national political party of any significance was represented in the village and all embraced one existing faction or the other. While political activities, such as organising processions (like the one on the day of the announcement of the new constitution) or holding mass meetings in preparation for general elections, are carried

out, political affiliation is fundamentally determined by the endemic factionalism in the village. This, in turn, is largely motivated by the competition over scarce resources and the search for power to influence their allocation.

### Factions, Caste, and the General Election

When the General Election approached, each of these "political" leaders targetted their canvassing, not so much on the *chokha* households, most of which were already aligned to one faction or the other, but on the *kamsel* households, almost all of which traditionally depended on richer *chokha* for their sustenance and survival.

All means were employed; the threat of eviction from their homesteads in the case of a *Sarki* failing to vote for the Congress, offer of money on behalf of some *Panchayat* candidates, invocation of traditional affinal relationships by the leaders' wives in begging for votes to make compliance ritually compelling, holding out hopes of resource redistribution in the village, and door-to-door visits by important leaders.

The *kamsel* found themselves in a great dilemma, and they finally resorted to "safe voting". More than being influenced by these appeals, they found it expedient to keep the powerful men in the community in good humour and, therefore, split their household votes among several candidates. The households without many votes were the ones who had to make a very difficult choice.

Of the *kamsel*, the *Sarki* had a very strong case for voting en bloc and against the Congress Party. Some two years previously, with loan assistance from SFDP, they had tried to purchase a fallow tract of land a little outside the village to build houses which would, at long last, have made them owners of their own homesteads. But the bid was foiled by the refusal of a local *chokha* who shared its ownership with another willing *Bahun* from a nearby village. The *chokha* incidentally was supported in this negation by another local *chokha* - who happened to be the former's adversary in an inheritance-related dispute but had his eyes on the land as the future homestead for his many sons. The imperatives of the village factionalism had lined them up together as protagonists of the Congress Party. But at the time of election, however, the *Sarki* vote too apparently split.

In the end, the United Marxist-Leninists garnered 115 votes, the Nepali Congress 110, the *Panchayat*-leaning independent candidate 45, 'Rohit' leftists 16, and the (ex-*panchayat*) National Democracy Party one.

### Traditional Social Order and Accountability of Leaders

Although all local *Panchayat* leaders had been chosen democratically, at least in form, based on adult franchise, people did not find the behaviour of those elected sufficiently accountable. Although, in extreme cases, they did resort to the option of rejecting an atrocious candidate for the post of *Pradhan Pancha* in favour of a person not considered as bad, as had happened in the early sixties, most of the time local politics was the monopoly of the *chokha* elites. The results of the election were influenced by machinations among different factions, the make-up of which continuously changes, depending on considerations of mundane gains, traditional enmity, and strategies for survival.

The villagers complained of gross misuse of government resources on the part of local leaders. For example, they mentioned a project in which only twenty thousand rupees were paid to local labourers and most of the remaining twenty-four thousand rupees was misappropriated by the leaders. They also pointed to the installation of an exclusive water tap giving 24 hours' supply in front of the house of *Bahun bado A*, whereas the rest of the village shared another system supplying water only for a few hours in the morning and evening.

It was also common knowledge in the village that the money granted for land terracing was used for turning *ghaderi*, cultivated by *Sarki*, into *gyula*. Afterwards the *Sarki* were told to shift to inferior land. To the villagers it was a case of clear-cut forcible misappropriation of land on the part of the local leader. Similarly, if one leader is known to charge exorbitant compound interests on loans, another will be suspected of having surreptitiously registered a local forest in his name.

Therefore, a credibility gap exists. On one hand, the local leaders boast of the number of development projects undertaken during their tenure in the village which, they claim, could have been eventually designated as a "model *panchayat*" by the government, had the villagers been only

more cooperative. So incensed are some of them, that they even dare to compare the local people with some species in the animal kingdom who refuse to go to heaven because they can not find there the filthy things they eat in this world.

But on the other hand, the *kamsel* are convinced, as are the poor *chokha*, that politics is a rich man's game and that, if the Government really meant to help them, resources would be delivered to them directly, bypassing national political representatives as well as district and local representatives who invariably misuse government funds at the first opportunity.

They also perceive a collusion between the district leadership and the local *thalu* (a traditional term denoting a member of the local elite who is publicly recognised and who, feared for his wealth, status, and legal prowess, invariably emerges as an elected leader), the former entrusting resources to the latter who misuses them for his own benefit. Others again point to certain well-dressed leaders and ask how they can afford expensive cashmere coats when they themselves, working so very hard, find it difficult to make ends meet.

Most district government officials have been no help to the poor, for they tend to be corrupt and side with the local *mukhiya* or other oppressors who provide them with graft. The land revenue office in the district capital (which appointed the *talukdar*) is the most notorious in this respect. Thus the possibility of an accountable and responsive political system for the people of Diyargaon, as for most of the Karnali Zone, remains quite remote, considering the fact that the local social order is deeply embedded in widespread and extreme poverty, unequal distribution of limited resources, caste segregation, illiteracy, and a highly exploitative structure of inter-personal relationships.

## **Local Political Leadership and User Groups**

However, when it comes to managing the local infrastructure, or protecting crops, forests, and grasslands, the leaders do cooperate with each other and with people across factional, caste, and class boundaries to create institutional mechanisms which, in esoteric terms, are known as user groups. The entire process of identifying and selecting local functionaries, fixing their remuneration, supervising

them, and evaluating their work is primarily carried out with the involvement and participation of distinguished local leaders, among whom *Bahun bado A* is very important.

In contrast to the secretive nature of the functioning of factions and political offices, user group management is more open and resources are mobilised in an egalitarian manner. Most development projects operational in the village, such as the irrigation scheme and the barley, grassland, and forest management systems discussed earlier in the relevant chapters, have indeed been implemented under the system. Recently, non-traditional development projects, such as a local drinking water system, have been managed along these lines and will be discussed in the following chapter.

One notable point, with vital implications for sustainable local development, is that the same local leaders, who have invariably been at the forefront of controversy, for having mismanaged external development funds, for having misappropriated public and private lands, for having lent money at exorbitant interest rates, or for having oppressed the *kamsel*, emerge as an indispensable galvanising force in the functioning of user groups on a sustained basis. Therefore, one important lesson that can be learned from this situation is that transparent and participatory management is critical for a more beneficial and egalitarian utilisation of development resources in rural communities, in general, and in stratified communities in particular.

## CHAPTER 6

# Development Interventions

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Despite its distance from Kathmandu, the district of Jumla has been the recipient of government-sponsored development interventions and the Sinja Valley, including Diyargaon, has been one of the important target areas. While a number of government projects function with the support of foreign aid, a few donor-funded projects are specifically targetted on the Karnali Zone, e.g., the Canada-aided Karnali Bheri Integrated Rural Development Project (K-BIRD) and the United Mission to Nepal (UMN)-assisted Karnali Technical School (KTS) in Jumla. However, the latter does not have a programme for Diyargaon, apart from providing training opportunities to a candidate or two from the village.

### **The Karnali Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) Project**

In principle, an integrated rural development programme, the K-BIRD Project, has been implemented in Jumla district in the Karnali Zone and in Dailekh and Surkhet districts in the Bheri Zone since 1979/80. The programme includes various rural development activities such as

agriculture, horticulture, livestock, forest and soil conservation, cottage industries, development programmes for small farmers and women, and appropriate technology. It also has a major infrastructural development component which consists of drinking water, irrigation, tracks, trails, bridges, and rural service centres.

Furthermore, each component represents only a part of the sectoral programmes of the Government that are being implemented in each district and, as such, cannot be separately identified by the villagers. Thus, of the 42 households in Diyargaon, only 15 were aware of the Project's existence, although, quite significantly, 14 of those respondents came from the *chokha* castes and only one was a *kamsel*.

The project does not cover all districts of the Karnali and Bheri zones. In Jumla itself, of the 30 Village Development Committees, the Project covered only 16 of them in 1989/90 (which also happened to be the last year of the second phase of the project when its continuation for a third phase [covering a wider area of Jumla district] remained uncertain).

Whereas the Project is generally aimed at enhancing the living standards of the people and promoting environmental conservation, some of its goals are more specific (such as the establishment of an Agricultural Research Station in Jumla). Its task also includes production of improved seeds for distribution to farmers; conducting research applicable to local agro-climatic conditions; and its outreach programmes (K-BIRD 1990: 5).

In Diyargaon itself, a number of activities are supported by the K-BIRD Project. The most prominent among them is the Rural Service Centre building which houses a number of development activities, e.g., agricultural extension, livestock development, Small Farmers' Development Project, and a local cooperative society. As sub-district level outfits, they serve Diyargaon and a number of other villages in the valley. While the land for the Centre building was donated by the local owners, its construction was funded by the Project, including substantial grants for the first three activities.

The project has funded a number of other development activities in the village through the Small Farmers' Development Project, such as adult literacy classes, a day care centre, and the renovation and expansion of a local drinking water project. Other activities carried out through

the Local Development Officer and related sectoral line offices in the district include an irrigation canal improvement, terrace improvement, and a general Village Development Training Programme intended to mobilise popular participation for all-round development of the village.

Despite the increasing investment in development activities in Diyargaon, the efficacy of the project is questionable. The agricultural extension office has often remained closed for months at a time, as a result of staff management problems. The few villagers who showed up occasionally for vegetable seeds returned disappointed. Although the agricultural programme has highly relevant goals, as mentioned before, given the highly specific nature of local agriculture and the already existing high levels of productivity, neither improved seeds nor improved farming practices to increase productivity have been available to the farmers.

The annual programme of the District Agricultural Office was more representative of the blanket nationwide programme of the Department of Agriculture, and it lacked the capacity to address the specificities of agricultural problems in Jumla. The K-BIRD Annual Monitoring Report (1990: 6) lamented that the extension programme has *"yet to widely reach the farmers' level"*. The only tangible benefit that farmers received from agricultural programmes was apple and walnut saplings. While the latter have become increasingly popular with local farmers, the former, too, despite some recent setbacks due to lack of markets (see Chapter on Agriculture), continue to be popular and are planted in larger numbers with an optimistic eye on the possibility of accessible markets in the future.

The proposed canal improvement under the K-BIRD Project was abandoned because the Local Development Office had the same project included also in a separate programme to be funded by a different source. It was a case of lack of coordination in the totality of activities implemented in the district. The terrace improvement programme created more problems than it solved (Chapter on Agriculture), and the aforesaid K-BIRD Annual Monitoring Report (1990: 21-22) itself again complained, from a different perspective, that such improvements had to be undertaken more systematically on demonstration plots and not in a sporadic manner.

In contrast, the livestock programme, which mainly consisted of animal health care, feed service, training, and breed improvement, was

more beneficial to the people because sick animals received treatment from the stockman in charge who was a local person.

The so-called Village Development Training Programme has shown little results, despite a locally recruited, full-time official. A local female volunteer, a member of a rich and powerful local household, had little time for her duties but she did benefit from the seventy-five rupees' allowance a day, she received during the three-day meeting held every month, as well as from two project-sponsored month-long study tours to different parts of the country over a period of two years.

### **Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP)**

Of the K-BIRD-funded activities, the SFDP has been, by far, one of the most important. Theoretically, under the programme, people with a per capita income of less than Rs 1,250 per annum are eligible to form voluntary credit groups and each group is given supervised credit for short, medium, and long-term projects at low, but differing, rates of interest, the highest being 18 per cent per annum. The proposed projects of individual members are reviewed by the group which recommends them to the project officials for loans which are extended on a group liability basis. Members are also expected to engage in off-farm and community development activities and to participate in group meetings which are critical for the proper use of the credit and which are supported by project officials.

In Diyargaon, there were six groups with a total membership of 50 households and there was only one mixed-caste group. However, they did not function under the stated SFDP norms, nor did they undertake group savings and community development activities. Loans, in fact, are made to individual borrowers directly by the project office and, they are, as described under the chapter on credit, often diverted to other purposes, mostly for paying off more exorbitant debts, by the poor, or for making exorbitant onward loans by the rich. In short, while SFDP, "*a priority activity*" for K-BIRD, "*is hailed as a programme ... successful in focussing resources on small farmers ... [and] essential for the upliftment of the poor majority of farmers*" (K-BIRD 1990: 29), in Diyargaon, where only one household has been considered ineligible for borrowing from this project, it has basically functioned more as a temporary cushion for a few poor farmers and as a source of extra capital for the rich. The poor themselves are head

and ears in debt to the *chokha* and the project officials are convinced that, unless the *kamsel* are liberated from this bondage, it will be virtually impossible for such a programme as the SFDP to help them effectively.

### Other SFDP Activities

The SFDP also runs two adult literacy classes in Diyargaon, and these are mostly attended by adults-to-be. Teaching and learning are literally impossible because the pine torches do not produce enough light.

It also runs a day care centre on its premises, managed by a female teacher who is aided by a female assistant (*sebika*) who mainly cooks and serves the mid-day meal to the children. Attendance differs but never exceeds twenty. Both *chokha* and *kamsel* are represented and fed together without segregation "because the times have been such that even those who have already shed their old teeth (i.e., the adults) might have to eat together (with the *kamsel*)".

### Drinking Water Project

Back in 1970, the fact that the then *Pradhan Pancha* had received a sum of 1,500 rupees in advance for a drinking water project in the community, from the then District *Panchayat*, was widely known to all villagers. It was not until 1978, however, that they were able to construct it. Altogether five taps were installed, including one which was placed on the edge of the *Pradhan Pancha's* premises.

But, because of poor plumbing in the reservoir and the poor quality of the synthetic pipes, the water system soon broke down and villagers had to face the problem of an insufficient supply of drinking water for many years until the local SFDP granted them 100,000 rupees in 1988.

This time, a new source some four miles away was identified. One of the poorest *Kami*, who had acquired technical know-how from a waterworks' project in India during one of his annual six-month visits to that country, was selected as the project contractor by the villagers.

The contract was for a sum of 15,000 rupees, to be collected at the rate of 200 rupees from each household. Poor people like the *Kami* contributed labour instead of cash, but the contractor complained that they showed up an hour late for work. In all, some 9,300 rupees were collected in cash and part of the remainder in labour contributions. A sizeable sum of money remained uncollected. In one case, a recalcitrant villager not only refused to pay part of the dues (Rs 56) but even slapped the collector each time he went to collect it. The scheme was completed in 72 days. The SFDP grant consisted of pipes which were procured by the project and transported to the village by those who contributed their labour.

The *Pradhan Pancha*, who had a separate reservoir and a separate line installed for himself, was unconcerned about collecting the dues. The contractor's recourse to the local police did not bring him more money; other than an unknown sum which they collected on his behalf, from which they used 500 rupees for a reception for the Zonal Commissioner who was invited specially to inaugurate the system.

The same *kami* has since been appointed by the community to work as the system's *chaukidar* (watchman) to open the reservoir at 5 a.m., close it at 11, reopen it again at 4 p.m., and close it at 8 p.m. In his absence, his wife and his son, who attends the local primary school, perform the chores.

Each of the 90 village households, using water supplied by the project, paid him one *pathi* (four *mana*) of barley in *Jestha* and an equal amount of paddy in *Kartik*. The *ex-Pradhan Pancha* does not pay because he has a separate line with a 24 hour supply. While the annual amount of 4.5 *muri* of grain makes up a good portion of his food supply, the *Kami* would prefer a higher and assured salary from the Government. As it is, he has been nursing a dilemma; because of this job he cannot go on extended stays to India, where he could easily make 900 rupees in Indian currency or some 1,500 Nepalese rupees a month. Besides, he has no tools for repair and maintenance and many lines in the village are without proper taps, in contrast to his experience in India where all the necessary tools, spare parts, and even lime for purifying the water were made available.

In addition the *Sarki* who live farthest from the reservoir have a score to settle. They too had contributed labour for transporting pipes to the village, but the length of the pipe was sufficient only for part of the

way to their neighbourhood. To make matters worse, the brother of a local elite misappropriated part of the pipe for his own use. Consequently, the *Sarki* continue to get their water supply from the Hema River.

### **Health Interventions**

Between 1970 and 1990, a number of changes have occurred in the field of health and some with increasing efficacy in recent years. A health post was established in 1978, and its building was constructed in 1986 with financial assistance of 26,000 rupees from the Nepal Red Cross Society and under the technical direction of the UMN-established Karnali Technical School situated in the district capital of Jumla.

The health post itself, an outfit of His Majesty's Government, leaves much to be desired. The health post in-charge has been absent for six years, apparently attending college in the district capital. The positions of two Auxiliary Nurse Midwives have always remained vacant, and only one of the two posts of Auxiliary Health Worker has been filled. The rest of the staff consists of Village Health Workers, a senior vaccinator, a Family Planning Worker, and three peons who are often used for dispensing medicine; a similar story to that of other Nepalese villages as described by Justice (1986: 101-106).

Medicines too are unavailable more often than not. The few patients who come to the health post with common ailments, such as worms, coughs, eye infections, fevers, cuts, and pimples, do so in larger numbers during the months of *Mangsir/Poush* (Nov/Jan) and *Chaitra/Baisakh* (Feb/May) and most return home disappointed. Often insult is added to injury because the health post charges a non-refundable amount of two rupees for registration before the patient is "examined" by whichever practitioner is present, and afterwards patients are often told that the appropriate medicine is not available.

### **Immunisation**

The immunisation programme, however, has been very popular and widely sought after by parents in the area. This programme, too, faces problems with regard to its support structure. On scheduled days,

when mothers congregate at the health post with their babies, the vaccines fail to arrive from the cold storage at a neighbouring health post, and the mothers have to come back with their little ones some other day over those mountain trails.

### **Acute Respiratory Infection Control**

As mentioned earlier, under the chapter on Population Changes, the Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) Control Programme was carried out as an experimental study with the technical assistance of John Snow Inc. and financial support from the USAID. It was implemented in a study area consisting of 18 selected localities in Jumla district (Pandey et al. 1991:994) and was introduced into Diyargaon in 1986. While the Infant Mortality Rate of the study area was reported to be 189/1000 live births, *"pneumonia was found to be the leading cause of death in infants after the first week of life, and was predominant between one week and six months of age ... 55 per cent of all childhood pneumonia deaths were in children under six months old and 70 per cent were in infancy. It was only after the age of six months that diarrhoea emerged as the leading cause of death"* (Pandey et al. 1991:96).

The programme is based on active case detection. A field-level health worker has three wards in his charge, consisting of some 50 to 120 households. Those with children under five and pregnant women are his target households. While he completes a round of all those households in two weeks, those households with children under treatment are paid follow-up visits every alternate day, or every day, if the case is serious. Each house has a number for this programme.

When a presumed case of pneumonia is identified, the worker gives the parents, free of charge, ARDIPRIM suspension, a broad spectrum antimicrobial, and the first dose is administered under the worker's supervision. While, in most cases, this treatment is sufficient, more serious ones are given Nephencol suspension.

The health workers are paid only 600 rupees a month and are supervised by a Junior Supervisor who works under a Senior Supervisor. Review meetings are held in the field once every two weeks. Records are meticulously kept and checked.

The programme has been hailed by the local people as very effective. The worker who was in charge of Diyargaon reported that he had

treated 246 cases during 2046 (1989/90) and that not more than eight or nine deaths had occurred during the four years of his work period in the village. Some villagers even hazard a guess that the decrease in deaths of young children is by about 70 per cent. The father of a sick child will trek for more than two and a half hours to seek the worker's help.

## **Family Planning**

Family planning, mostly in the form of permanent male contraception, is gradually becoming popular in the village. Approximately 26 male adults have undergone vasectomy operations. In the sample itself, only six of them had undergone this operation.

There have been three deaths in the village that local people attribute to the operation and which occurred within six months, one year, and five years of the operation. Some men have also complained of decrease in sexual potency, although not in their physical strength. Most men are afraid of this operation for a variety of reasons, including the fear of possible death or loss of physical strength. The reasons most people give for having many children are lack of a son, having only one son, and fear of the death of their existing children.

Those who have undergone the operation have between four to six living children and state the lack of sufficient land and food as their prime motivations. Some respondents stated that they would have undergone this operation long before the number of their children reached four or five. But they could not do so because there were no facilities for such an operation which is only organised occasionally here in the form of a temporary camp. Female contraception facilities are unavailable in the district.

Another health-related intervention has been the Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) Programme under which a mothers' group is organised in each ward, which then selects one member as a FCHV. The volunteer is supposed to be trained and supported by the government health structure in order to enhance people's access to primary health care, mainly for women and children.

After the local organisers of the programme formed the mothers' groups, women were selected and trained as FCHVs. Although the

women do congregate for training, which brings them 40 rupees as daily allowance, the programme has been marred by the broken assurance of an honorarium of 100 rupees per month which was to be received by each volunteer. In Diyargaon itself, the volunteers who were selected included the same lady from the household of the local elite who also worked as a field worker under the VDTP programme mentioned earlier. The health post staff have realised that the selection of volunteers by their predecessors was wrong.

## School

One primary school, which has been functioning in the village for many years, was awarded permanent status only in 1988, making it eligible for annual government operation grants. It has four classes with an enrolled student population of 58, which temporarily swells to 60 or 70 during the three-month period from *Falgun/Baisakh*. Almost 50 per cent of the enrolled students are *kansel*, mostly *Od Kami* who honorifically register themselves as *sikarmi* (carpenters). Only a few *Damai* children, no *Sarki*, and very few girls go to school. Dropout rates have been very high. Whereas there were 33 students in Class 1, Class 2 had seven, and Classes 3 and 4 had only nine each.

In the sample population itself, there were 24 boys and 18 girls of school-going age, of whom 15 boys and six girls (none of whom were from the *Sarki* caste) were reported as enrolled in school. Two teachers from neighbouring villages and one female teacher from Palpa (wife of a teacher in a neighbouring school) made up the teaching staff. The school is housed in a shed which the people had built for the police post. The post was shifted to its present, more expansive, location across the river after a few months. What little furniture they have has been donated, again by the Small Farmers' Development Project, and was purchased for a sum of 5,000 rupees. Teaching materials are very limited and the arrival of two gift parcels through the local post office, consisting of pens, pencils, and other articles of stationery, donated by an Italian tourist, were a novelty for the institution.

## Other Development Activities

Jumla was one of the eighteen districts which came under a long-standing government programme called "Remote Area Development"

and which contributed mostly to the creation of infrastructures such as tracks, trails, bridges, drinking water, and schools. Similarly, the erstwhile District *Panchayat* also distributed government grants for similar infrastructural projects.

Diyargaon has been the beneficiary of assistance from these two programmes for building a local bridge and for a trail to its nearest highland farm; for both of which free labour, in excess of the financial grant, was generated. According to the local system, a villager would be paid only 50 per cent of the normal wages for every day of work carried out.

In the case of the trail, a saving of 2,400 rupees was made from the government grant, and this was spent for reinforcement of a centuries' old irrigation canal in the village. A part of the rocky mountain side was excavated to construct a permanent channel for the canal, replacing the wooden aqueduct which otherwise had to be replaced every five or six years.

### **The Cooperative Society**

The local cooperative society has been in existence since 1977, covering a large area consisting of seven Village Development Committees, including Diyargaon, with a membership of 2,707. The area has been divided into three sub-areas, each sending three members to the Board of Directors which has a local elite as its Chairman.

Since the Small Farmers' Development Project issues production loans, the society's activities is presently limited to operating a consumer store where fertilisers and seeds brought from the district capital; locally purchased maize, millet, and barley; clothes; stationery imported from the National Trading Limited; chillies from Mugu; and other assorted articles such as turmeric, mustard oil, and kerosene (also imported from outside) are sold.

Salt is not sold because the Salt Trading Corporation in Jumla demanded a prohibitive amount of 75,000 rupees as a deposit before it gave any allocation. Consequently, this greatly restricted the society's activities because the salt could have been traded for food grains which, in turn, could have been bartered for Tibetan salt from *Mugali* traders.

The society could not obtain a bank loan because seven other societies in the district have defaulted on them. The society runs on occasional grants from the Government, although it would have liked to earn from its own transactions. What remains of its share capital of 32,000 rupees is sufficient only for the small-time trading that it is engaged in. The Board of Directors does not meet, because the Directors want meeting allowances, and the threat of the manager to quit is met by a similar one of mass resignation on their part. The manager himself compares the current scope of work with a religious ritual in which the presiding priest asks his client to make an offering of a perforated chunk of iron and the latter comes up with a needle.

### **An Assessment of Development Performance**

Between 1970 and 1990, many government-sponsored development programmes have been implemented in Diyargaon and its vicinity, and many of them have even established permanent offices in the locality. A post office and a police post have also been established. For a remote village like Diyargaon, the proliferation of development-related and other administrative institutions does conjure up a scenario of accelerated development and even the vision of a "Model Panchayat" in the area.

Nevertheless, most of these development programmes suffer from some in-built weaknesses. Most of these programmes have been mechanical extensions of development programmes conceived and structured in some remote programme headquarters, and they have failed to address the specific features of Diyargaon where they are to be implemented. Thus, while programmes like agricultural extension are irrelevant to the highly specific climatic conditions and technological traditions of Diyargaon, others like the SFDP clearly lack the ability to address the problems of an oppressive socioeconomic structure and rapidly declining resource base.

The development programmes also lack the capacity for conflict resolution in the faction-ridden society of Diyargaon and its vicinity. For want of consensus in the area, the local people had to wash their hands off two major financial allocations from the K-BIRD Project. One of them was for building a wall around the Service Centre, because one of the landowners had been reluctant to transfer the title of his plot of land to the Service Centre. The other was of far greater

consequence for the area; a hydro-electric project that would provide seven villages with power, including facilities for rice and flour mills. However, the political rivalry among the leaders in the area and the spread of disinformation, stating that it would result in less irrigation water for downstream villages, led to the delay and subsequent cancellation of the multi-million rupee project.

Two programmes from which local people could directly benefit and which could even lead to growth in the area have been horticultural development, mostly in apples and walnuts, and (less exorbitant) trading capital for the poor. But the basic infrastructure has not been developed, i.e., a proper market for the fruits or the provision of capital loans from the SFDP or cooperative facilities to entrepreneurs. The few programmes that they perceive as beneficial are the non-government pilot project for acute respiratory infection control and projects for drinking water, trails, and bridges.

A vast majority of the people are also wary of the irregularities in management and of the misappropriation of development funds. The magnitude of this problem can be gauged from their claim that "if the central cabinet appropriated one lakh of rupees for them, it would be only 25 thousand by the time it got to the VDC. And then the VDC would take its own cut of 20 thousand which would leave five thousand from which the overseer would take another cut of 2,000 rupees leaving only 3,000 for the village". They feel that development funds for the village must be directly channelled to the people without any interference in between.

Most people view the majority of the so-called development programmes with a sense of disgust. They know that without major projects, such as the road link to the outside world, progress will not be possible. They see the existing development programme as nothing more than just "sprinkling asafoetida and cumin powder", which does nothing to augment the quantity of available food. They feel that all the people in the village are poor and they compare the unequal size of landholdings with the insignificant difference in the size of ant houses. Therefore, they are convinced that Diyargaon's and Jumla's development depends on road links to the outer world.

## CHAPTER 7

# Conclusions

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Despite its inaccessibility, Diyargaon has undergone many changes in the two decades between 1970 and 1990. Most of these changes are linked to the transformation that the country has undergone throughout many decades.

In contrast to the relative seclusion of the earlier period, Jumla and Diyargaon have been exposed to a number of external interventions which have had both unsettling and assimilative effects on the local people. With the introduction of the grassroots' based *Panchayat* policy, culminating in national level organisations, local political leaders could participate in the affairs of the district and interaction with the rest of the country also intensified. As a small but significant indicator of development, a civil servant in the area is no longer called a *Gorkhali* (meaning a representative of the House of Gorkha which conquered and annexed the territory in the late eighteenth century). Government authority, which was once represented by the highly-feared administrative chief known differently at different times, e.g., the *bada hakim* (or literally the big chief) during the Rana regime and, later, the Zonal Commissioner, became more open to negotiation and

freer interaction under the system. The local *Panchayat* even passed resolutions against corrupt officials.

More significant, however, has been the introduction of a number of national development programmes in the district which were also implemented in Diyargaon. A fairly large number of services has been established with the stated objective of socioeconomic development of the area, although a few of them, such as the building of infrastructure, educational, and health interventions and the introduction of fruit crops, mainly apples and walnuts, have been more useful and effective than others. With the injection of more cash into the local economy, a tiny little bazaar-like settlement has sprung up in the village, encouraging a number of village households to set up trailside stores and escalating the real estate prices in the particular area in the process.

### **Population and Socioeconomic Changes: The Tightening of the Noose**

The most important change has, however, been the acceleration of population growth during the twentieth century, portending the end of over a century of homeostasis in Jumla (Bishop 1990: 359). In 1970, Bishop had noted that serious population pressure was already being felt and had observed that the region lacked the capacity to support the then population of 175,000. Prospects for controlling the population growth were dim (Bishop 1970: 40).

The prophecy has more or less been borne out in Diyargaon, where the means of livelihood have always been scarce. The population increased by 32 per cent during the two decades between 1970 and 1990, and this created its own gradual, but significant, ripple effects on the life and economy of its people.

Diyargaon has been far from being an egalitarian, homogenous society. Despite its poor resource base, it is highly stratified along economic lines and orthodox Hindu caste division, one largely reinforcing the other.

While agriculture remains the main basis of subsistence, the land endowment has been very small, 8.5 *muri* (0.1 ha) per capita, which also includes a substantial proportion of least productive *lekali* lands.

The situation is much worse for the majority *kamsel* whose per capita land ownership is only 4.8 *muri* (0.06 ha) and includes an overwhelming proportion (63.5%) in *lekali* lands.

Although the upper caste households have made some gains in their land ownership status (from 8.4 *muri* per capita in 1970 to 12.7 *muri* in 1990, i.e., from 0.1 ha to 0.16 ha), it has not been very significant in absolute terms, and more so considering the fact that the majority of such landholdings (50.8%) again are comprised of *lekali* lands.

As a consequence, only 12 out of 42 households in the sample produce sufficient food to last them for 12 months or more in a year (a number of the former also export foodgrains out of the village).

But the limits to the expansion of agricultural holdings, as stated earlier, have been reached because of the creation of the expansive Wildlife Sanctuary in the vicinity of Diyargaon, restrictions imposed by the Forest Department, and the sheer unavailability of cultivable fallow in the highlands.

Other developments too have affected the fortunes of the rich and the poor, primarily the *kamsel*. Population increases in the southern region, where the rich of Diyargaon traditionally took their large herds of cattle for winter grazing, have forced them to withdraw because of the inroads made by the local people in terms of the expansion of cultivated land and appropriation of what remained of the pastures for their own livestock. This, coupled with the closure of the precious pastures by the Sanctuary, effectively resulted in the drastic reduction of their herds and, consequently, in the radical shifting of the emphasis in their household economies.

Similarly, the restriction imposed by the government authorities on what little exports they made in the past, in terms of local medicinal herbs and other natural products, made the winter migration more difficult for the poor. Among the *kamsels*, the *Damai* further face the mounting problem of less tailoring jobs in the village because of the increasing import of readymade clothes by their clients.

The *kamsel* generally suffer from an even more serious problem. While the traditional Hindu perception of the twice-born having to take care of all the material needs of the untouchable service castes has all but ceased to be observed, the socioeconomic disabilities

enjoined upon them by the orthodoxy of the religion remain intact. This has made them the weakest contenders in the increasingly fierce competition for limited resources, and it has subjected them to a systematic regime of exploitation at the hands of their better-equipped *chokha* neighbours.

On the health and population front, however, the introduction of two effective health measures, namely immunisation and control of Acute Respiratory Infection, has drastically reduced mortality among children and is certain to result in a more accelerated growth of population in the village. The people are, indeed, already aware that the local population is too numerous and can foresee the worsening of the already acute problems of shelter and sustenance for most of the village inhabitants.

All these changes have forced the people of Diyargaon to intensify their search for newer coping options and have affected both the poor and the rich alike.

#### *Increasingly Desperate Search for Coping Options*

While the pursuit of new options for the rich is not necessarily occasioned by the hardships of existence, to a considerable extent it is influenced by the twin problems of population growth in their own households and by their aspiration to ensure a more secure future for their offspring in a situation where the land resources are limited - unlike in the past. Therefore, their advantages, in terms of economic prowess, political might, higher caste status, ability for mutual collusion, and access to and art of exploiting the government system, enable them to expand their holdings by fair means or foul. They convert their *ghaderi* into *jjula*, diversify their crops by cultivating apples and walnuts, lend money at an exorbitant rate of interest, engage in more capital-intensive seasonal and longer-term trading, and even go in for occasional adoption of birth control devices.

The mercurial nature of village politics and factionalism too are basically guided by the same motivation for resource gains and augmentation. The fact that the basic philosophies of such programmes as the SFDP, VDTP, and FCHV are compromised for spurious loans or for getting one's family member appointed have also been developments in the same direction.

However, it is the poor majority of the village, with diminutive land holdings, whose search for options is becoming even more desperate. Faced with the compulsions of feeding and clothing their expanding families, the *kamsel*, in particular, resort to distress borrowing, use SFDP loans to pay off more exorbitant ones, part with a portion of their landholdings, pay for the land in terms of labour, forsake possible *kamsel* solidarity, distribute their votes safely among different protagonists in elections, and go hungry when necessary. In contrast, however, a few *Sarki* have also managed to extend their range of alternatives by learning to work as builders - an occupation traditionally assigned to the *Od Kami*.

In the current scheme of things for most *kamsel* and other poor in the village, seasonal migration, to find work as labourers or for petty trading, is by far the most important of the options for their survival. Those with some business acumen and the wherewithal to put together a little cash - their own or borrowed at exorbitant interest rates - go mostly to Gorakhpur and range through a wide area of adjoining villages peddling the wares bought in the city. While exaggerated and often misleading claims have always been associated with such trade everywhere, the traders from Jumla do a more successful job of it with their wares. At present, they buy third-rate goods in India and sell them in its rural hinterlands as Nepalese products of very high quality.

Similarly, many less fortunate people, mostly *kamsel*, go to north India for labour jobs, many of them on prolonged sojourns. Often, their families back home do not hear from them for years on end. Some do not show up at all. But, once living in the village becomes impossible, migrating permanently to north India or to the Nepal *terai* remains the only option, whatever the consequences. In recent years, a few *kamsel* households have already taken up this option.

It is now the poor, mostly the *kamsel*, who have been pushed to the wall with little options left. Any adverse change in bilateral relations with India, affecting their movement across the border, is sure to bring about untold suffering to these people. Recently, a few *Jumli* have been spotted in Kathmandu peddling their wares, obviously as a bid to diversify their options. During the 1988-1990 Indian embargo against Nepal, most still managed to get across the border, some even running past the check-post at the risk of their own lives, which further illustrates the extent of their desperation.

Although the options available for the rich and poor have been diametrically opposed, there are a number of activities that they carry out jointly. The conservation of local forests, maintenance of local institutions for irrigational management, crop protection and grassland conservation, joint collection of pine needles from the forest, labour or cash contributions for building trails and bridges, and the management of the drinking water system are issues that they tackle to maintain or even invigorate their lifestyle.

Every household in the village, *chokha* or *kamsel*, rich or poor, has a stake in the proper operation and maintenance of these activities or projects. They, as a matter of habitual obedience, abide by the unwritten rules governing them which have been handed down to them through the generations or have been more recently introduced, as in the case of the construction and management of the drinking water projects, the construction of trails and bridges, or the reinforcement of the traditional irrigation canal. In essence, there exists a symbiotic relationship between the upkeep of these services and their related institutions, on the one hand, and the continued survival, sustenance, or even enhancement of the quality of life of the local people on the other. It is because of this situation of symbiosis that, despite the intense competition, conflict, and animosity inherent in the relationship between the rich and the poor, they cooperate with each other and contribute resources as necessary to ensure that their survival interests are not compromised.

### *Some Theoretical Implications*

Despite its location in the mountain fastness of western Nepal, Diyargaon has been a scene of sustained change, both in its internal socioeconomic structure and in its natural environment. As described earlier, the steady increase in population and the shrinkage of highland pastures, among others, have, in recent times, been accompanied by increased clearing of the *lekali* forests, portending far-reaching dislocations in the downstream areas of the country and beyond. Similarly, the restrictions imposed by the Government on some of the traditional local experts have taken their own toll by deepening the dependency of the poor on foreign sources of sustenance. And the people generally are aware of the possibility of even

accelerated growth in population, in the not too distant future, promised by two successful health interventions.

While Diyargaon has, thus, been the scene of stresses and pressures generated both externally and internally, the responses of different social groups have differed. While the more fortunate have further solidified their positions by extending their landholdings, engaging in other lucrative pursuits, and otherwise entrenching their hold on political power, the poor, meagrely endowed in terms of agricultural land and persecuted by the rich through the many means of exploitation, have found themselves dependent on the increasingly tenuous sources of sustenance - which do not preclude permanent out-migration.

Given such a variability in responses between different groups and the impact made on the environment with far-reaching consequences, the proposition that it is a "*homeostatic state of life in the insular upper Karnali basin*" (Bishop, 1990:350) does not represent the unprecedented dynamics taking place in the region. Similarly, the assumption that "*social systems possess a tendency to re-establish some form of balance when confronted by changes or pressures that are systematically disruptive*" needs to be further examined and elaborated in the light of the Diyargaon situation which is more accurately described by Bishop's characterisation of the Karnali Zone as an "*ever-increasing downward spiral of degradation*" (1990:364).

The process of change in a highly stratified, traditional, and resource-scarce context like that of Diyargaon is conditioned more by the underlying forces of stratification, a stratification that results in the differential use of political power for the preservation and promotion of the interests of a privileged segment of the population. This phenomenon manifests itself in the clearing of the forests in the highlands, conservation of forests in the immediate vicinity, formation of, albeit transitory, profitable alliances, retention and careful nurturing of the much-needed *kamsel*-related institutions of *haligado*, *lagi-lagitya*, labour supply, and, at the same time, the ruthless exploitation of their own village brethren, driving the latter into acts of desperation.

However, had the political power - which is generally a function of economic power in a traditional community characterised by widespread poverty, illiteracy, and caste/ethnic stratification - been

more evenly distributed, it can be reasonably assumed that the pattern of change would have been largely different and certainly more egalitarian and participatory.

Another issue of theoretical importance is the sustenance of local traditional institutions such as the *narala* system of forest and crop protection, the *kumthi* system of irrigation management, or the more recently innovated *chaukidar* system of drinking water management and maintenance. Each beneficiary of these activities contributes to the payment of remuneration to those functionaries, some based on the extent of benefits received (e.g., four *mana* of grain for each *muri* of land irrigated) or on equal sharing as for the payment of the *narala* or *chaukidar*).

The binding force between these activities and their beneficiaries is the state of symbiosis between them which, in turn, is articulated and realised by the traditional decision-making mechanism dominated by the elites. It is locally structured in nature, elastic in composition, transparent in functioning, and participated in by most of the *Thalu* in the village, including a *kamsel* or two of higher economic standing and well-regarded by their fellow caste members. As informal as this leadership structure is in the village, it is, nonetheless, the only forum that is widely regarded by its inhabitants, represents the genius of the community, and carries with it the power of sanction against its erring members. Thus, it is the basis of stability in the village, of community action, and even of general improvements in the area, as evidenced by the operation and management of the drinking water system and by the protection of the *thapala* forest or that of the 'lonely pine'. In other words, the existence of a state of symbiosis expresses itself through the participation of its beneficiaries who, in a traditional context, are often represented by their informal leaders.

Corollarily, when such symbiosis breaks down, the traditional institutions that have sustained it are allowed to wither away by the beneficiaries themselves. This has happened in the case of the traditional cooperative arrangement for transhumance which ended when a decrease in the herds of cattle made it no longer necessary for the feed and dairy products to be ferried between the village and the pasture.

Furthermore, such symbiosis does not always involve the entire community. For instance, while the *narala* system of barley crop

protection is widely participated in in the village, it includes only those households which have barley crops to protect. But the fact still remains that they must invariably include a sufficient number of the members of the traditional decision-making apparatus who lend substance to the state of symbiosis.

### **Some Implications for Sustainable Mountain Development in Nepal**

The insularity of the Karnali Zone (and of most mountainous regions in the country) has, in the past, been characterised by high birth and death rates, occasionally punctuated by Malthusian interventions, and thus some form of balance between population and available resources reestablished itself eventually. However, with developments in transport and communication facilities, such as roads and airlinks; the spread of a national education system; and intensification of political, administrative, economic, and other sociocultural contacts with the outside, the insularity has gradually yielded its place to greater identification with the national mainstream of life and economy.

In the Karnali Zone itself, the Government has been conducting programmes for the economic and social uplift of the region since the early sixties (Bishop 1970:30). These efforts were further supplemented by the implementation, in 1967, of a separate, Remote Area Development Programme in the eighteen northern districts identified as "remote". While the former represented the extension of the general national development programme to the zone, the latter aimed at addressing its specific problems and potentialities. This is when the propagation of apples, walnuts, and apricots received a major boost in the area. Other important development activities that followed in the zone have been the establishment of the Jumla Agricultural Research Centre in 1970 and the implementation of the Canada-aided Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) Project in 1979/80.

While many of these interventions, as described in the preceding chapters, have been irrelevant to the region and feeble in their implementation, all the above factors working together, including the introduction of patent drugs and miracle vaccines, however limited, had the net effect of steady growth in population. Although it has been slow at present by national standards, a mounting imbalance

between population and resources is already taking place in the village. And with the dramatic success achieved by the ARI Control Programme, it is bound to lead to an even steeper rise in population which, in the absence of other complementary interventions, is certain to further aggravate the imbalance.

The present picture, therefore, of Diyargaon and of the Karnali Zone, is one of distorted development interventions. While the insularity of the region has been breaking down rapidly under external influence, the so-called development programmes have failed to come up with adequate policy, technology, and resource support to help achieve a new balance through increments in production and in the productivity of the local economy. As a consequence, while the natural environment has come under extreme stress, the lives of the disadvantaged majority have become so much more difficult. Whatever potential exists for the economic development of the region has gone largely untapped. What follows, therefore, is the description of some essential steps that should be taken to enhance the quality of life and of the environment in the region.

#### *Local-level Planning for Mountain Development*

Sustainable development of a community or geographical area presupposes the implementation of an adequate package of mutually complementary interventions, both in policy and programme activities, which are directly addressed to the specificities of the target area and people. Such an approach is all the more necessary in the case of the Karnali Zone where terrain, altitude, latitude, climatic remoteness, history, and cultural traditions, among others, not only lend distinctiveness to the region but also distinguish one area from the other, or one group of people from others inside it. Therefore, all development interventions must be planned at the local level, so that each of the specific attributes of the local problem can be appropriately and adequately addressed based on the priorities that reflect the aspirations of the targetted people.

#### *Participating Approach to Development Interventions*

Secondly, the Nepalese bureaucracy presently suffers from many deficiencies, resulting in low motivation and corrupt practices which

are even more pronounced among most officials working in remote rural locations. And even if the Government were to take up the problem in earnest, it will be many years before an effective turn-around can be expected. Therefore, given the long-standing tradition of participatory management of local assets and services in the area, it becomes both essential and desirable to depart radically from the practice of bureaucratic control of development projects and activities and to entrust them to the demonstrated capability of local beneficiary-focussed institutions. Such an approach would also result in increased local resource mobilisation on an ongoing basis, contributing to sustained development of the area.

As an exception, some success stories have been reported in mountain agricultural development in the country, such as the two British-aided agricultural farms namely the Lumle Centre (Pound et al. 1992:711-736) in west Nepal and the Pakhribas Centre (Chand and Thapa 1992:737-760) in east Nepal. But among the principal reasons for the continuity and effectiveness of the programmes have been "*professional satisfaction, good housing facilities, a good remuneration package, good training opportunities, and a good working environment*" (Pound et al. 1992:719) for the staff. Although such foreign-aided projects with relatively high levels of investment can succeed as long as the aid lasts, according to past experiences, they have not been found to be replicable elsewhere or sustainable after the withdrawal of aid. During the foreseeable future, it is highly unlikely that the Government would have the necessary resources to provide so many "good" things for the development of agriculture in this mostly mountainous country.

#### *Retargetting of the Poverty Alleviation Programme*

Thirdly, substantive interventions should be made in favour of the poor in the region. The so-called Small Farmers' Development Programme should be immediately retargetted to allow for the exclusive access of the poorest of the community to its credit facilities. As a part of this study, an exercise was successfully undertaken to see if a meeting widely participated in by local people can arrive at an unprejudiced consensus as to the ordinal ranking of the poorest households from the bottom stratum. Such a methodology would be simpler, more cost-effective, and more efficient and valid than the ones heretofore applied in the identification of its clients.

## *Social Development of the Poor*

Much of the disabilities of the poor are also due to their lack of basic capabilities, such as literacy, which affects the whole gamut of their behaviour and attitude towards life and society. Therefore, social development activities, primarily in the fields of literacy, health, and civic education should constitute a part of the small farmers' development endeavour in the area.

### *Capital Loans for Trading*

Furthermore, since most of the poor in Jumla have a demonstrated acumen for trading, a line of credit for trading capital should also be provided as part of the Small Farmers' Development Project. This will go a long way towards relieving the poor from the clutches of the rich man's usury in the village.

### *Women's Development*

In the villages of Jumla, probably more than elsewhere in the country, women play a major and indispensable role in the economy of the households, but with a status much lower in relation to their economic role.

However, improvement in the quality of life in the families and the community would, to a large extent, depend upon the ameliorative role that they can play. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that, as part of the mountain development strategy in the country, special programmes and policies for women's advancement be included.

The basic thrust of such interventions should be to depart from the acts of a largely charitable nature, such as free tuition for girl students, or enrolling a handful of them in sewing and knitting activities, etc. It has always been difficult to market their products, thus placing definite limits to what little they can contribute to women's development.

The approach should be one of **empowerment** and **enablement of women** in a manner so that the menfolks find it in their interests and in the interest of the household to encourage them to participate in

development activities both inside the house and outside. One such intervention could be to make small livestock loans from the SFDP **exclusively** accessible to female borrowers. Since almost all households in the village keep small livestock, most men would very likely find it in their interests to have their women participate in the SFDP group activities. However, in the process of such participation, they would be exposed to other activities of social and economic development in the household and the community and develop sufficient confidence to assert their own rights in the household and in the community.

Other interventions along this line could be the allocation of government development grants to the villages, based on the literacy status of women in them; villagers with a larger proportion of literate women getting more resources in grants for such activities as irrigation, drinking water schemes, schools, etc. Similarly, local jobs, such as extension agents in health, education, agriculture, and livestock development, could be exclusively set aside for female candidates only.

However, the most effective intervention would be to make legal provisions for entitling women to a part of parental inheritance. This should dramatically alter the status of women in the household and in society.

Furthermore, the national leaders, planners, and policy-makers alike must internalise the basic premise that the improvement in women's status is required, not as an act of altruism but as a deliberate strategy for the all-round development of the community. No single intervention for national development would be as potent as the empowerment and enablement of women in the communities.

### *Population Control*

Since there is now an increasing realisation in the village of the need to limit the number of children, although in most cases after having exceeded the number recommended by the experts, contraceptive services should be made more widely available. With the increased effectiveness of health interventions and the reduction in infant and child mortality, there should be every likelihood that parents would go in for contraceptive devices. In the case of Diyargaon particularly,

where infant and child mortality has been effectively brought under control, it could also be seen as an experimental case to see if a direct relationship exists between the reduced mortality of children and greater adoption of population control measures.

### *Road Artery*

Central to the question of the development of the Karnali Zone is the issue of a road link to the south. It has all along been of paramount importance to properly harness the potential of the zone and to capitalise on the comparative advantages of the region. The emergence of a road would not only result in the dramatic expansion of fruit and vegetable farming, with a salutary effect on the environmental situation in the highlands, it would also lead to the realisation of other development possibilities such as herb farming, highland and mountain tourism, high altitude forestry, and the installation of a number of hydroelectric projects. These developments would have a major impact in bringing about some fundamental transformations in the life and economy of this otherwise remote foresaken region.

The totality of these interventions presupposes the designing and implementation of a systematic and integrated development approach, so that each of the related components function in mutual complementarity and coordination to ensure maximum return from investments. Given the proposition that the package also include a high-cost road project, such complementarity should be even better assured.

However, the story of integrated rural development in Nepal has generally been a story of dismal failure, and many donor-funded projects criss-crossing the country have little to show for the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on them for the stated purpose of achieving increased living standards for the people and improved environmental conditions in the area (Shrestha 1992:11-13).

In specific terms, a major donor, namely Canada as mentioned earlier, has been involved for more than twelve years in so-called integrated rural development in the selected districts of the Karnali and Bheri zones. But the project has hardly anything substantial to show for it other than an occasional infrastructure here and there. For most poor

people, at least in Diyargaon, the project has either been inaccessible or largely irrelevant. Despite the association of scores of foreign and local experts, the project lacked even a respectable database for future comparisons, and it has no idea how it has affected the numbers of the poor people in the region.

In the case of a roadlink too, an all-weather road, connecting Jumla with the east-west highway and the rest of Nepal, was initially planned as far back as 1970 as part of the Fourth Five Year Plan of the country (National Planning Commission 1986:230). It has yet to become a reality, even after two decades of national development efforts and 12 years of the Canada-funded K-BIRD Project.

In the initial stage of the project's formulation in the late seventies, an empathising Canadian economist in charge of the exercise had included a proposal for what was then called a "motorable mule-track", for moving All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) from Surkhet to Jumla, and which was to be constructed largely by the means of labour contributions from the adjoining villages. While such a mule-track would have heralded the beginning of motorised transport for the imports and exports of the region, it would also have generated increasing interest from different sources in its continued maintenance and upgrading.

Despite the proposal's excited reception in government circles, the expatriates who succeeded the economist shot the idea down, presumably at the behest of their Canadian employers, and thus effectively suppressed any consideration of the vital artery as they pursued the "integrated" development of the region. It was a historic opportunity lost to the people of the region.

While the need for *"greater focus on upland-lowland linkages, use of regional complementarities in development strategies, and recognition of comparative advantages of the mountains"* are emphasised for mountain agricultural development by Jodha et al. (1992:19), they are much easier said than achieved in practice. For instance, regional planning as the approach to capitalising on north-south complementarities in Nepal has long remained a common refrain of the successive periodic plans of the country. Nevertheless, little has been accomplished in that direction, primarily for want of both capability and commitment to move beyond the stage of the rhetoric. Experience has shown that, unless some fundamental and sustained shift takes

place in the vision and understanding and managerial abilities of our national leaders and planners, in favour of a more egalitarian, judicious, and participatory national development approach, regional planning and development, with their attendant demands and challenges, will continue to elude the people in the outlying areas.

The situation thus calls for an approach which is professionally and managerially less demanding and which, at the same time, is also consistent with the stated ideological thrust of the national polity. Therefore, it is further suggested that, whatever the merits of a comprehensive regional planning approach for the country, the planners should desist from repeatedly embarking on such ambitious rhetoric. They should instead make beginnings in that direction by instituting and strengthening local planning and implementation mechanisms in the districts and villages in the regions. As the decentralised plans begin to be smoothly formulated and implemented, the need for ensuring supportive conditions and activities at higher level would begin to crystallise. Such a bottom-up approach is more likely to gradually build the foundations for substantive regional plans in the country. In short, a decentralised planning and implementation system must constitute the basis for sustained mountain development in the country.

#### *Non-farm Income and Employment Opportunities Outside the Region*

However, some problems are already obvious and need effective resolution. It has been seen that, given the extremely meagre landholdings of most villagers, the incomes earned from winter migration already constitute an important component of their household economy in the village. And, with the assured prospect of a steady increase in population and definite limits to the possibility of expanding their landholdings, their non-farm sources of income will be increasingly indispensable in future years. Thus, the need for extra-regional employment and income opportunities will only intensify in future.

In this connection, there are some important lessons to be learned from the experience of Switzerland which went through environmental degradation of the Alps due to deforestation for agriculture "before a series of catastrophic events triggered measures for effective protection. And, even then, forest policy alone was unable to solve the problem.

*Growth of industry and the service sector in the pre-Alpine belt and in the urban areas of the midlands contributed in two ways: they produced the financial means for an ambitious programme of environmental respiration and they provided employment for large sectors of the mountain population which encouraged outmigration. The population pressure on the mountain ecosystem was reduced" (Guller 1986:82).*

In the case of Diyargaon too, it is highly unlikely that the goals of enhancing the living standards of the people and the quality of their environment can be met by efforts limited to the confines of that village which, as stated earlier, is highly circumscribed by meagre and unevenly distributed landholdings, mounting population pressure, and unavailability of any significant non-farm employment and income opportunities other than those substantially supplemented by the provision of employment opportunities for its poor people outside the area. This could gradually lead to their permanent out-migration, thus contributing to the easing of the population pressures in the Karnali environment.

Similarly, resettlement schemes for the poorest could also be contemplated. However, such schemes in the past have almost always involved the clearing of diminishing forest areas and large investments in infrastructure and relief for the settlers. The management of such schemes has been consistently difficult also, often resulting in inefficient use of resources and long-drawn out problems for the settlers. Therefore, it is further suggested that resettlement should take the form of providing employment and income opportunities in or around existing settlements, or even urban areas, which would provide them with access to ready-made infrastructural facilities, such as drinking water, and social services such as health and education facilities. A line of credit could additionally be provided to assist the settlers in terms of resources and management capabilities, in addition to saving increasingly scarce forest resources.

However, the fact would still remain that, in the midst of stiff competition from people from other parts of the country and often also from India, employment opportunities cannot be obtained easily for the unskilled from mountain regions. Therefore, with a view to addressing the larger goal of environmental management and of helping the poorest of the poor, a policy of job reservation, especially in government-run projects or enterprises, should be contemplated also.

The targetted poor themselves can be identified through the same method recommended above for the reorientation of the Small Farmers' Development Project.

Should such a policy of easing pressure on the mountain environment be successful, the reduction in the number of people in the region would also result in the decreased availability of labour for the landed households. This situation would force them to revert to less labour-intensive, more environmentally-friendly, and less perishable cropping systems such as the increased farming of walnuts and apricots, especially on the *lekali* lands.

### *Multinational Firms for Mountain Development*

In a resource-scarce economy like that of Nepal, mobilising enough money to build a roadlink to Jumla or implementing an adequate programme of integrated development in a relatively less populated and remote region like the Karnali Zone will remain prohibitive propositions for many years to come. As is seen from the preceding discussions, even major donors shy away from providing more than what appears to be cosmetic interventions. As it is, after so many years of involvement in the region, the donor-funded programme has been unable to even "reach" most people, let alone make a positive impact on their problems. The situation in the region continues to deteriorate, as referred to above "*locked into an ever-increasing, downward spiral of degradation*" (Bishop 1990:364).

Given the direness of the present situation, possibilities should be explored for attracting and engaging one or more multinational firms to invest in the development of the Karnali Zone as a business venture under conditions that they might find sufficiently lucrative. While the Government and interested international donors alike should seriously investigate this potential, other friends of Nepal too, who have been mesmerised by the pristine beauty and serenity of her mountain setting, should take it upon themselves to assist the country in this search to alleviate the ubiquitous squalor and poverty that lay underneath the captivating allure of its mountain scenery.

# Plates



Female health volunteers at the health post to attend monthly meeting



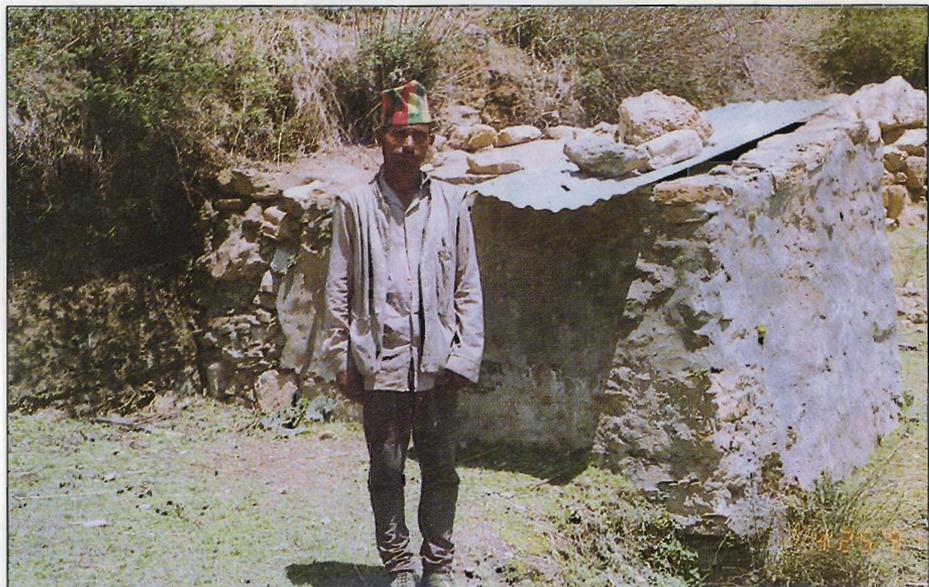
Fertiliser application on paddy fields



Little boys and girls setting out to the jungle in search of mushrooms to be sold as aphrosidiacs for high prices in India.



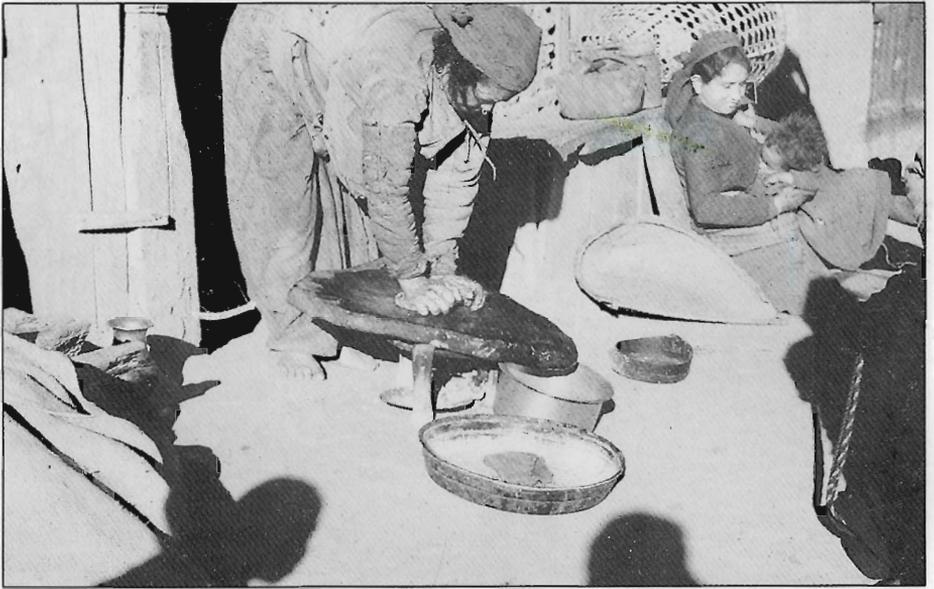
A few mushrooms thus collected



The *Chaukidar* of the local drinking water system in front of his reservoir



A girl printing her garment



Woman pressing oil from mashed seeds of a local wild fruit



*Od Kami* and *Sarki* ploughmen eating a good meal before a day's ploughing



A distinguished  
*thalu*



Barley threshing with a flail on a local rooftop

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# Topic Index

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## Chapter 1

### a

- agricultural land, 6,8,11
  - khet* (irrigated), 10
  - pakho* (unirrigated), 10
- agricultural land base, 5

### b

- bado* (neighbourhood), 12,13,14
  - bado* system (residential segregation), 13
- basin*, 5,8
  - intermontane, 8
- bhandar* (store), 15
- bhed gamu* (miracle), 27
- Bhotia* (people of Tibetan origin), 11
- bitulo* ('polluted'), 12,13
- borso* (central room or kitchen), 15
- Brahmanic Hinduism, 28
- "*Brahman-Thakuri* consortium", 21

### c

- carrying capacity, 3,17
- Chhetri* (previous
  - Khasa* commoners), 11,20,22
  - matwali Chhetri*
    - (alcohol-consuming *Chhetri*), 11
  - chokha* ('clean'), 12,13,16
- climate, 8
- competencies, 6,7
  - socioeconomic, 6,7
- conceptual, 4
  - framework, 4
  - postulates, 4
- convergence of power, 7
  - economic, 7
  - political, 7

### d

- data, 7
  - household, 7
- Decentralisation Act of 1982, 2
- development programmes, 3,7

Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) Project, 3,14  
 Small Farmers' Development Project, 14  
*dhami* (oracle), 27  
*dharma shala* (rest house), 10  
*dharmaic* role (service to the high castes), 24  
*dhwang* (see *pagri*), 14  
 district, 1, 25  
 Jumla, 1,25  
 diversity, 5  
   economic, 7  
   social, 7  
 division of labour, 18  
*dum* ('polluted' caste), 11,12,21  
*Damai* (tailors and musicians), 7,12,13  
*Kami* (carpenters, masons, ironsmiths, goldsmiths), 7,12,13  
*Sarki* (cobblers), 7,12,13  
 dynasty, 2,9,10  
 Kalyal, 2,10,12  
*Khasa Malla*, 2,19,20  
 Rana, 11  
 Shah, 10,11

## e

ecological 'niche', 5  
 endogamous, 21  
 exchanges, 5  
   inter-locational, 5  
   inter-regional, 5  
 exogamous, 20,25

## f

family, 25  
   extended, 25  
   joint, 25  
   nuclear, 25  
 forces of change, 4,7  
   external, 7  
   internal, 7

## g

Gorkha conquest, 2  
 government services, 14  
 Health Post, 14  
 Post Office, 14  
 Great Himalaya, 8  
   northern arm, 8  
   southern arm, 8  
 guidelines, 4

## h

health interventions, 18  
   Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) Intervention trial, 18  
   Community-based Antimicrobial Treatment of Pneumonia, 18  
 hierarchy, 6,19,20  
   caste, 6,20  
   class, 6  
 Hindu Rajputs, 10  
 holistic frame of reference, 3  
 homeostasis, 5  
   "homeostatic state", 5,7  
   "stationary equilibrium process", 5  
   "steady state", 5  
   "structural functional equilibria", 5  
*hulak* (relay postal system), 10

## i

institutions, 24,25,28  
*haligado*, 24  
*ista* (bosom friend), 25,26,27  
*baisali* (a relationship between two persons who have identical names and like each other), 26  
*dharma ista* (an *ista* relationship without material overtones), 26  
*heetko ista* (a genuine *ista* relationship), 26  
*mate ista* (earth *ista*), 26  
*mit* (each confers upon the other the status of a member in each other's family), 26  
*sangi* (a fellow traveller), 26

*jhara* (compulsory labour system), 10  
*lagi-lagitya* (in the capacity of *lagitya*, the *kamsel* render to their *lagi* specialised services), 24  
*parma* system (agricultural labour exchange), 29

interactions, 5  
    economic, 5  
    social, 5  
internal diversity, 5  
    altitude, 2,5,8  
    aspect, 5  
    slope, 5  
inter-regional dynamics, 2,3  
interventions, 3,4,18  
interviews, 7

## j

*jat* (relative caste), 19  
    "dominant twice-born 'big' castes", 20-22  
    "untouchable low 'small' castes", 19,20,28  
        *achut* (untouchable), 20  
*jimmawal* (vested with the authority of looking after *khef*), 10  
Jumla principedom, 10  
*Jumli* (people of Jumla), 26

## k

*Kami* (untouchable), 7,12,13  
    *Lohar* (ironsmiths), 13,22  
    *Od* (carpenters and masons), 13,22,23  
    *Sunar* (goldsmiths), 13,22,24  
*kamsel* ('polluted' caste), 11,12,16  
*Khasa*, 9,10,11  
Kingdom of Nepal, 10

## l

land tenure, 10  
limiting factor, 5  
    temperature, 5

## m

*majh khand* (see *borso*), 15  
Malthusian solutions, 17  
management, 3,4,6  
    user-based, 4  
*Markandaya Purana* (an early Nepali text), 9  
marriage, 25  
    hypogamous, 25  
    matrilinial cross-cousin, 25  
*Masto* (highly feared deity), 28  
*mauja* (revenue units), 10  
methodology, 4,7,  
    anthropological method, 7  
micro-level, 3  
mountain, 3,4  
    community, 4  
        stratified Hindu, 4,6,7  
    environment, 3,6,28  
*mukhiya* (vested with the authority of looking after *pakho*), 10  
Multipurpose Service Centre, 13

## n

*Newars*, 11  
non-Hindu *Khasa* migrants, 11

## o

office records, 7  
options, 6,7

## p

*pagri* (an unbroken row of two to seven dwelling units), 14, 15  
*Pahari* (hill people), 11  
pattern of, 2,4,7  
    population distribution, 2,12  
    response, 4  
    settlement, 4,12,13  
population changes, 16  
    child mortality, 16,18  
    death rate, 16

- infant mortality, 16,18
  - population growth, 3, 16
  - principalities, 10
    - Baise* (twenty-two), 10,20
    - Chaubisi* (twenty-four), 10
  - process of change, 6
- q**
- questionnaires, 7
- r**
- race
    - Caucasoid groups, 9
    - Mongoloid tribes, 9
  - religious tradition, 27
    - Hindu pantheon ("hidden gods", non-incarnating), 27
      - Ganesh, 27
      - Shiva, 27
      - Vishnu, 27
    - Masta* pantheon (sons of the Hindu God Indra, incarnating, possessing), 27
      - nine *Bhawani* sisters, 27
      - twelve *Masta* brothers, 27
  - resources, 3,4,5
    - community, 7
    - mountain, 3
    - natural, 4
    - resource use, 5
  - river, 8
    - Hima or Sinja, 8
  - river valley, 1,2
    - Hima or Sinja, 1
- s**
- saligram* (amorite), 27
  - seasonal migration, 4,22,28
  - serma* (cash assessments based on estimates), 10
  - specificity, 5
    - limited resource base, 7
    - natural conditions, 7
  - strategies, 4
    - ecologically-sound, 4
  - stratification, 6,11
    - Hindu caste structure, 11
      - Brahman*, 7,11,12
      - Thakuri*, 2,7,10
      - Chhetri*, 11,20,22
      - dum* or *kamsel*, 11,12,16
  - structure, 4
    - socioeconomic, 4
  - subba* (district governor), 10
  - subsistence, 4,5,6
  - sustained development, 4
  - system, 4,5
    - open, 4,5
- t**
- taxation, 10,11
    - Thakuri*, 2,7,10
      - Hamal (offspring of Acharya fathers and *Thakuri* mothers), 12,21,25
      - Malla, 2,9,10
      - Shahi, 10,12,20
  - topography, 2
  - trading, 4,18,24
  - typologies, 4
- u**
- user groups, 2
- v**
- valley floor, 8,26
  - varna* system (Sanskritic caste system), 19
    - Brahman* (priests and religious teachers), 19,20
    - Kshatriya* (kings, warriors, and aristocrats), 19,20
    - Vaisya* (traders, merchants, other similar professions), 19,20
    - Sudra* (cultivators, servants, and so on), 19,20
    - untouchable castes, 19
  - village *panchayat*, 1,7

**w**

western Nepal, 1,9

**y**

*yagna* rites (in which offerings are made to the fire), 14,15

**z**

Zone, 1,2,4

Karnali, 1,2,4

## Chapter 2

**a**

agricultural land, 37,41,43

*khet* (irrigated land), 31

*pakho* (unirrigated land), 31

**b**

*bado* (neighbourhood), 39,40,41

barter, 54,62

*bennu* (specially prepared seedbed), 49

*bhuwa* (local term for *pakho*), 31,32,35

*ghaderi bhuwa* (*bhuwa* where the homestead is located, i.e., unirrigated land), 32,37,47

*lekali bhuwa* (*bhuwa* on the *lek* or high cliffs), 31,32,36

*Brahman-Thakuri* consortium, 43

**c**

calendar of female activities, 66,67

capital investment, 70

*chokha* ('clean'), 33,41,45

cholera epidemic of 1975, 44

class categories, 33,34,35

collateral (exclusively land deeds), 72

consumption, 70

credit, 54,70

crop, 32,44,46

export crop, 44

*ghaderi* crops, 49,50

*lekali* crops, 50

major crops, 46,47

production, 31, 46

productivity, 32

protection, 50

rotation, 46,49,50

three-year cycle, 50

**d**

development programmes

Remote Area Dev. Programme, 57

Small Farmers' Dev. Project, 71

*dhagre* (simple labourer), 63

distress borrowing, 53

*dum* (a more derogatory term than *kamse*), 45

dynasty

Jalandhar kings, 43

*Marulle* king, 68

**e**

export potential, 51,55

farmyard manure, 51,56

dried pine needles, 51,66,67

*pire* (special grass), 51

**f**

festivals, 33,63

*Dasain* (the most important Nepali festival), 63

*Maghe Sankranti* (first day of *Magh*), 63

*Shrawan Sankranti* (first day of *Shrawan*), 63

fodder, 45

grass, 45,50

supply, 45

food, 51,52

seasonal food shortage, 54

sufficiency, 51,52

forced germination of paddy seeds, 48

forces of change, 43  
forest land, 44,45  
    cultivable, 44  
    titled owner, 44  
    undeclared, 44

## g

government organisations  
    agricultural office, 51  
    Cooperative Society, 54  
    District *panchayat*, 69  
    Forest Department, 46  
    Rara Wild Life Sanctuary, 46

grasslands, 45

## h

horticultural development, 56  
    apples, 56,57,58  
    walnuts, 56,58

## i

institutions, 55  
    *haligado*, 33,37  
    *ista*, 37,55,56  
    *lagi-lagitya*, 33,37  
        chokha lagi, 33  
        kamsel lagitya, 33,37  
irrigation, 32,44  
    *kumthel* (members  
        of *Kumthi*), 68,69  
    *kumthi* management (strong  
        beneficiary-based, local  
        institutional arrangement), 68

## j

*jau* (barley), 32  
*jjyula* (local term for *khef*), 31,32,33  
    *chyute* (only one good crop of  
        paddy a year is grown), 32,46,47  
*jawad* or *jawadi* (mostly paddy and  
    barley are grown), 32,46,47  
*seem* (swampy land which gives

only one good crop of paddy a  
year), 32,46,47  
Junior Technical Assistants, 57

## k

kamsel ('polluted'), 33,39,40  
    *Damai*, 37,40,41  
    *Kami*, 40,41,43  
    *Sarki*, 40,41  
*Khasa*, 56,63,75

## l

labour, 37,59,61  
    agricultural, 59  
    mobilisation, 61,65  
        female labour, 65  
        *kamsel* labour, 61,65  
        *lagitya* labour, 61  
        *parma* system, 61  
    requirements, 59  
    wages, 61,65  
        daily wages, 65  
land, 32,33,37  
    distribution, 32,33,34  
    ownership, 32,33,37  
lenders' market, 72  
livestock, 66,72,74  
    ownership, 75,76  
    seasonal movement, 77  
    types of livestock, 75  
loans, 69,70,71

## m

Malthusian interventions, 44  
*mela* (a generic term used to denote  
    either work or holdings), 81  
migration, 48,53  
*Mugali*, 53,54,55

## n

*narala* (watchmen), 50

o

- organisation of pasturing, 78
  - naso* (another arrangement meaning holding and giving in trust), 78
  - saundi* (traditional institutional mechanism under which flock owners go to the pasture in small groups of three or four people), 78

P

*Pawai* (Khas), 75,77

r

- relative economic status, 32
  - primary indicator, 32
- renumeration (for *lagitya*), 63
  - khalo* (payment), 63,64
- river, 77
  - Sinja, 77
- Rodini* (variety of paddy), 55

s

- sample, 33,37,39
- "saturation indebtedness", 74
- selective adaptation, 46
- slashing and burning, 46
- subsistence system, 31
  - annual cycle of farming, 31
  - transhumance, 31

t

- Thakuri*, 41,43
- Thalu* (a member of the local elite), 80
- three year-long drought, 44

u

- upward mobility, 41

v

- valley, 55
  - Sinja, 55
- varna* philosophy of Hinduism, 43

y

- yield rates, 51,52,55

### Chapter 3

a

- agriculture, 87

c

- chokha* (upper castes), 84
- Community Forestry Programme/Project, 85,89

d

- decision-making process, 87,90
- deterioration of village forests, 84,86,87

f

- forest, types of, 89
  - "*Ashoje*", 89
  - PPF (Panchayat/Protected Forest), 89
  - "Winter", 89

g

- government intervention, 89
  - promotional posture, 89
  - restrictive posture, 89,91
- Government sub-district forest office, 91,92,94
  - male committee, 94
  - supervision committee, 90
  - female committee, 90,94

**k**

*kamsel* (lower castes), 84,90

**l**

landholding, types of, 87

*ghaderi*, 87,88

*iyula*, 87,88,93

local custom (*ritithith*), 87

**m**

*mukhiya* (headman), 90

**p**

*pakho* (unirrigated land), 83

*piral* (fallen pine needles), 87,88,90

*Pradhan Pancha* (village head), 91

population growth, 84,86

protection and management, 88

**s**

*sandhi sarpan*

(community property), 84,85

*serma* (homestead tax), 83

system, 88,90,91,83

*Panchayat*, 91

traditional forest

management, 88,95

*ban naralo*, 89,95

community land grant, 88

*Kumthel*, 95

**t**

*talukdar*, 90,92

typology, 93

**u**

user group forestry, 93

**Chapter 4****a**

annual agricultural calendar, 98

**b**

*baniyas* (shopkeepers), 103

*Byansi* (people of Darchula), 100

**c**

*chokha* (upper castes), 105,109

**d**

defense mechanisms, 106

**i**

institution, 98

*ista* (bosom friend), 98,108

**j**

*Jumli* (people of Jumla), 101,103,107

**k**

*kamsel* (lower castes), 101,105,109

*Khas*, 98

**l**

limited resource base, 98

**m**

migration, 97,98,100

long-term, 98

seasonal, 98,100,103

*Mugal Bhotia*, 97

**n**

network, 97,98

economic, 97

social, 97  
transportation, 98

increased pressure of  
population, 101

## p

population growth, 98,103

## r

returns from working and trading  
trips, 107

## s

salesmanship, 99  
subsistence system, 98  
    manual work, 98,100,101  
    trading trips, 98,100,106  
"symbiotic exchange", 97

## t

Tibet, 97,98  
trade, 97,98,101  
    inter-regional, 97  
    intra-regional, 97  
    Trans-Himalayan, 97  
trading pattern, 100,103  
    destinations, 100  
    purposes, 100  
    wares, 100  
    asafoetida, 103,104,106  
    horses, 98,100,102  
    medicinal herbs, 98,100,102  
    mushrooms (*marcela*), 109  
    *shilajeet* (ayurvedic medicine  
    and aphrodisiac), 100,104,105  
    *taro* (white geological  
    substance), 100, 101  
    woollen products/  
    goods, 97,98,100  
trading post at Joljibee, 98,100,102  
trade regime, 101  
    changes in the infrastructure, 101  
    forces of change, 101

## w

western Malla Kingdom, 97  
western Nepal, 97

## Chapter 5

### a

accountability, 120  
adult suffrage, 112,113

### c

*chokha* (upper castes), 114,119

### d

dwindling resource base, 111

### f

factionalism, 114,117,119

### g

general elections, 118,119

### h

Hamal *Thakuri* (offspring of *Brahman*  
father and *Thakuri* mother), 115

### i

institutional mechanisms, 121

### k

*kamsel* (lower castes), 112,114,117

### m

*mukhiya* (headman), 112,112,121

multiparty system, 117  
     CPN-UML, 117  
     National Democracy Party, 120  
     Nepali Congress Party, 116, 117, 118  
     "Rohit" (splinter leftist group), 116, 118, 120

**o**

orthodox Hinduism, 111  
     caste segregation, 111, 121  
     exploitative economic structure, 111  
     stratified social structure, 111  
     uneven resource distribution, 111

**P**

*Panchayat* System, 112, 114, 117  
     *Pradhan Pancha* (head of the village), 112, 113, 114  
 political base, 113  
 political structure, 111  
 population growth, 111

**s**

"safe voting", 119  
 Seventh Five Year Plan, 113  
 sustainable local development, 122

**t**

*talukdar*, 111, 114, 115  
 traditional forces, 111  
*thakuri*, 115  
*thalu* (a member of the local elite), 121

**u**

user groups, 113, 121, 122

**v**

Village Development Committee, 112, 113  
 Village *Panchayat* Act, 112

**c**

*chaukidar* (watchman), 128  
 Cooperative society, 124, 133

**d**

development interventions, 123  
     donor-funded, 123  
     government-sponsored, 123, 134

**h**

health interventions, 129  
     Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) Control Programme, 130, 135  
     family planning, 131  
     Female Community Health Volunteer Programme, 131  
     health post, 129, 130, 132  
     immunisation programme, 129

**k**

Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development Project (K-BIRD), 123  
     adult literacy classes, 124, 127  
     agricultural extension, 124, 125, 134  
     day care centre, 124, 127  
     drinking water project, 124, 127  
     environmental conservation, 124  
     livestock development, 124  
     Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP), 124, 16, 132  
         community development activities, 126  
         voluntary credit groups, 126  
     Village Development Training Programme, 125, 126

**r**

"Remote Area Development", 132

**s**

- specific features, 134
  - conflict resolution, 134
  - declining resource base, 134
  - irregularities in management, 135
  - mechanical extensions, 134

**Chapter 7****d**

- development interventions, 146
  - Jumla Agricultural Research Centre, 145
  - Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) Project, 145
  - Remote Area Development Programme, 145

**e**

- economy, 146,148,150
- external interventions, 137
  - national development programmes, 138,145

**g**

- Government authority, 137
  - bada hakim* (literally meaning big chief), 137
  - Panchayat*, 137,138
  - Zonal Commissioner, 137

**h**

- homeostasis, 138
  - "homeostatic state"/ homeostatic, 143

**i**

- implications, 142,145

**k**

- kamsel* (lower castes)/castes, 139,141,142

**l**

- landholding, types of, 139,141,143
  - ghaderi*, 140
  - kyula*, 140

**o**

- options, 140,141,142
  - for coping, 140
  - credit, 147,148,153
  - poverty alleviation programme, 147

**p**

- per capita land ownership, 139
- poor resource base, 138
- population growth, 138,140

**r**

- regional planning, 151,152
  - Fourth Five Year Plan, 151
  - integrated development, 150,154

**s**

- sustenance, 140,142,143

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