

DEVELOPMENT AS A PROCESS OF MARGINALIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE ARUN VALLEY KUMAL COMMUNITY

Shambhu P. Kattel

Introduction

A number of key development initiatives have taken place since 1960s in Nepal, especially after the establishment of the National Planning Commission and its efforts in drafting periodic development plans. Many Nepali people have experienced the effects of development firsthand in different sectors such as land reform, communication, transportation, health, and national education programmes. In addition, important infrastructure programmes have been implemented by the state over this period of time (Mishra 1997). The Nepali word for these types of development activities is '*bikash*'. *Bikash* carries the meaning of its Sanskrit roots - 'growth' or 'evolution.' In everyday parlance, however, *bikash* has come to refer to things, especially those commodities that come from elsewhere. Nepali people are often talking about material reality when they use the word *bikash*, whether it is water pipes, plastic buckets, new breeds of animals and fruits, electricity, video cassettes, trucks, or airplanes (Pigg 1993).

Developments in physical infrastructure are meant to bring progress and economic growth to the local people, but the results of this study contradict this notion. In my study area, the local Kumal people have been marginalized and displaced from their land and their occupations as a direct result of various development activities in nearby Tumlingtar.¹ They are dissatisfied with these development activities because their socio-economic situations appear to be regressing, rather than progressing. Here, I will present results of my research with a Kumal community of the Arun Valley (for more detailed account of Kumals in Tumlingtar see Kattel 2000). I will discuss many of the issues that they currently face as a result of development activities in Tumlingtar. I will also discuss the external factors related to development and the internal factors that have pushed them towards marginalization. Additionally, I will present some cases detailing how they have lost much of their traditional hold on land and on their occupations; what they think about development; and a description of their pre-existing socio-economic and political situation. In order to situate this research within development discourse, I will start with a broad discussion of the discourse of development itself.

Development Discourse in Anthropology: A Framework of Analysis

Many theorists assert that as a set of ideas and practices, 'development' has historically functioned over the twentieth century as a mechanism for the colonial and neocolonial domination of the south by the north (see Escobar

1995)². Especially after the post-World War II decline of colonialism worldwide, capitalists continued their hold on the third world through spreading markets of their products (science and technology) in the name of development. In this way, the developed countries (especially western countries) changed their strategy from direct political domination to economic domination through development institutions, thereby continuing to maintain neocolonial power relations to the third world. They came with attractive themes such as 'empowerment' or the redistribution of the world's riches to the poor (Barfield 1997, Escobar 1995, Gardner and Lewis 1996).

There are a wide variety of approaches and debates in the literature on development in general and in anthropology in particular. The classical economists like Adam Smith, J. S. Mill, and T. R. Malthus asserted the positive aspects of development (cf. Lokanathan 1996) whereas Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists have argued that development is a 'non-egalitarian activity of the capitalists'. In anthropology, there are two main divergent paths regarding development. One path is taken by those who are involved in development activities through development institutions following the traditional approach. These people are generally known as development anthropologists, the concomitant subject matter being development anthropology. The other path is taken by those who criticize western models and emphasize new forms of analysis. This field is generally known as the anthropology of development (Gardner and Lewis 1996).

We can understand the word 'development' to mean a political process because it appeared as a result of colonial power. Thus, when we talk of 'underdevelopment,' we should also understand that we are referring to unequal global power relations (Escobar 1995). Generally, development refers to a process of change through which an increasing proportion of a nation's citizens are able to enjoy a higher material standard of living, healthier and longer lives, more education, and greater control and choice over how they live. State planners, donor agencies and social movement organizers are actively working towards such positive changes. But, many also realize that there are negative effects of development interventions and have changed their approaches accordingly (i.e. trickle down to peoples' participation models). A significant amount of literature about and discourse within anthropology deals with the negative effects of development. Many theorists argue that some aspects of development are actively destructive and dis-empowering (Des Chene 1996; Escobar 1995; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Pigg 1993). This study confirms these theorists' critiques insofar as the traditional Kumal potters have been forced to become porters and labourers, losing their traditional hold on land and their occupation as a consequence of development activities. My arguments supporting this claim are based on six-month's fieldwork that I conducted from July to December 1999 as part of an M.Phil. Thesis project (see Kattel 2000).

The Kumals of Tumlingtar

Tumlingtar spans wards 12 and 13 of Khandbari Municipality, in the Koshi Zone of Nepal's Eastern Development Region. It is a major residential area for Kumals. There were 163 Kumal households, comprising a population of 814 people and 46% of Tumlingtar's total population in 1999. According to a number of my Kumal respondents, Kumals settled in Tumlingtar during the unification period of eastern Nepal (1774-75 A.D.). Originally serving as assistants to the conquering armies, they purportedly settled down after unification as the state representatives of the region. After subjugation of the Limbuwan,³ it was essential to have state representatives of the region for two purposes: to bring the local people into the unified state and to control local revolts. The emerging Nepali state had some fear of neighbouring Tibet, Sikkim and India that they might support local revolts (Regmi 1978, Kattel 2000). The Kumals settled in Tumlingtar, but they were a distinct minority from socio-cultural and demographic perspectives. They thus invited another group of Kumals from the Dudhkoshi region who were potters to settle in Tumlingtar. This group quickly became well known across the region for their skills. The Kumals integrated socio-culturally with this group and thus became identified as clay potters in the region. These groups were very involved in *balighare*, the local commodity and service exchange system.

Tumlingtar is a fertile area with alluvial soils for agriculture and it had enough forest and water resources for firewood, timber, and fishing. It is situated in an area between the Arun and Sabha rivers, which serve as the main tributaries into Nepal's biggest river, the Koshi. These riverbanks provided soil mines for pottery. Situated on the riverbanks, Tumlingtar lies at an elevation of 400 to 700 meters above sea level. In this tropical climate, Kumals lived with significant autonomy for more than a hundred years. They were involved in agriculture, pottery, and fishing without much competition from other groups in Tumlingtar.

Socio-culturally, Kumals are Hindu, but they have also accepted some of the local practices such as bride price and worshipping of natural objects. They claim that they originated from Brahmans and thus use their own priests as opposed to Brahman priests in rituals. These Tumlingtar-based Kumals prefer to identify as *jat* Kumals and claim differences from the Newar and the Tarai Kumals. Due to their relations with the high caste group and their political power as state representatives, they were originally recognized as a higher ranking group than the local Kirantis (see Kattel, 2000 for details). In the 1854 state codified caste system, Kumals were classified as enslavable *matawali* peoples (Höfer 1979). They were potters and had secured positions in the traditional *balighare* system. As metal and plastic utensils were not yet available, clay pots had great value in the region and the raw materials to make them were widely available.

Thus, pottery became the occupational identity of the Kumals of Tumlingtar, even though they had cultivable land and were also involved in agriculture. Non-Kumal, high caste immigrants arrived in Tumlingtar only after the introduction of the *panchayat* system and after development activities had been initiated in the area. The Kumals describe bitter experiences both with high caste people and with development activities. They claim that high caste people and development activities are the reasons for their loss of land, resources and autonomy. And they claim that they have been displaced from their traditional occupation. Here, I will describe the major development activities and the processes by which Kumals have been displaced from their land and their occupation.

The Airport: According to Kumals, the airport is their main *abhag* (misfortune) and *dukha* (hardship) because they lost approximately 80% of their productive land (see Appendix: 1) as a result of airport construction. Many families were displaced from their traditional habitats and some of them migrated to the Tarai and to India during the airport construction. They claim that misfortune began in their lives with this airport construction, which also introduced famine and disease in the area. For example, they explain that wind from the airplanes effects productivity of the land (*shaha*) and that this wind has blown a weed called *banamara* (*Eupatorium adenophorum*) all over their fields, disturbing the crops. They also claim that their life-protector gods and deities abandoned the area due to airplane noise and thus there is increased famine and disease.

Despite the 30 year operation of the airport, not a single Kumal has traveled by airplane from or to Tumlingtar. Rather than have brought the community benefit, they claim that the airport has displaced them from their land holding position and occupation. It introduced a market economy, bringing modern clothes, plastic and steel utensils, and a variety of foods to the region. Selling and buying of grains began in this community along with the introduction of the market. As a result, the airport has disrupted both the traditional production and the *balighare* distribution and exchange of these items.

Construction of the airport resulted in direct seizure of some lands and decreased productivity, as well as accelerating the process of Kumal alienation from the land. During fieldwork, I found that non-Kumals own more land than Kumals. Non-Kumals occupied 42% of the total land, while development programmes (including the airport) occupied 37% and the Kumals have only 21% of the total land. The Kumals spoke of never having been compensated for their land by non-Kumals. These non-Kumals grabbed Kumal land through various tricks and treacheries (*jaal* and *jhet*). My Kumal respondents were suffering from the treacheries of the non-Kumals and many recalled similar stories. Before describing these events, it would be relevant

to mention a common one, how a respected *mukhiya*⁴ cheated Kumals during the airport construction.

How have the land losers missed out on compensation?: High ranked people in this area are not only higher in terms of religion, but are also higher in political and economic terms. The Chhetri *mukhiyas* arrived in Tumlingtar along with the introduction of the *panchayat* political system and have accumulated power through expanding relationships with villagers, government officials, and politicians. When they became chiefs of the local government units, they motivated villagers to become involved in development interventions and took the Kumals' land for these activities. The following is an interesting example of the non-Kumals' treachery:

Box 1: Treachery by a Mukhiya against innocent Kumals during construction of the airfield

When the younger *mukhiya* was elected chairman of the local panchayat, he motivated the villagers to become involved in canal construction. They sent an application to the district center. However, the district chief expressed the government's interest in airport construction in Tumlingtar, and requested a piece of flat land for the airport from the applicants. They made an agreement with the district chief to provide land for an airport and free labour for a few days as well. Initially, the Kumals provided 737 *ropani* (1 hectare = 20 *ropani*) of land for the airfield, as well as two days' free labour from the total 120 Kumal households. They recall that at the time of construction, the officials took their goats, pigs, and chickens without paying. When the work started, the villagers did get some money as compensation.

The amount of compensation was Rs. 29-100 per *ropani* or more depending on the quality of the land in question. The elder *mukhiya*, Ratnadhaj, convinced all the Kumals that it was better for them to receive compensatory land instead of money. They accepted his advice and gave him the money received as compensation. The *mukhiya* informed them that he would return this money to the government and request land instead. He took the money, went to Kathmandu for the land (according to him), and came back after one month. He informed them that the government had given 1,000 *ropani* of land in Gobindapur.⁵ Most of the land losers went to see the land and some of them settled down after clearing the bush. Those who did not like the land went to India without asking for their money back from the *mukhiya*. The Kumals who had settled in Gobindapur later found out, during land registration, that the land had not been given as compensation by the government. Rather, the land was already registered in the *mukhiya*'s name. In fact, the *mukhiya* had bought the land himself, using the compensation money from the Kumals. It thus appeared that the *mukhiya* wanted to clear the bush and convert it into productive land using the Kumal's labour force. The elder *mukhiya* had become rich and powerful accumulating a huge tract of land in the Tarai, while the Kumals had lost both their compensation money and the land.

During a discussion regarding the airport and the non-Kumals' arrival, Nete Kumal summarized the situation with the following proverb: *aafnu*

bariko daura ghans, aafnai srimatiko satya nas. Loosely translated, this means that Kumals gave the non-Kumals a place to settle, they used the Kumals' fuel and fodder, and when allowed to come into their houses, they took the Kumals' wives. As a result of the airport, a large number of non-Kumals arrived in Tumlingtar, and Kumals claim that they always bring problems with them.

How have non-Kumals plundered the Kumals?: I attended some gatherings and meetings regarding the issue of land boundaries, credit dues, mortgaged land and conflicts surrounding the resource extraction between Kumals and non-Kumals. I observed that, in all cases, non-Kumals dominated the Kumals. I thus began to try finding out about such events and cases, how and in what conditions they occurred and how non-Kumals benefited from the situation. Most Kumal families who are currently involved in portering and labouring told me stories similar to what happened during the airport construction. They told me stories about how their land was plundered. These types of cases were quite common during that time, they informed me. In fact, I witnessed some of the events myself during fieldwork and found some interesting stories behind them. The following cases are representative of these common events:

Box 2: A bitter experience of Jit Bahadur Kumal with the Mukhiya⁶

Case A: When discussing the treachery of non-Kumals, many informants advised me to talk with Jit Bahadur Kumal. One day, I went to his house. I could easily guess that he was a very poor farmer by looking at his small huts and the torn clothing that he wore. I had seen him following the elder *mukhiya*, chief ward member of the municipality, and at the local police station several times. I introduced myself to him and expressed my desire to talk with him. He replied that he had a busy schedule. He had to chase birds away from a rice field in the morning and had to follow the *mukhiya* later in the day. I decided to go with him to the field, to chase away the birds and talk. He agreed and together we went to the field.

Jit Bahadur told me that he lives with his family of nine at Naula *gaun*. According to him, one day (at some point in 1991), he decided to sell a piece of land in order to take care of a debt. He fixed a price of Rs. 12,000 and agreed to sell the land to a Brahman. When they were going to the Land and Taxation Office in Khandbari to transfer the land rights, the elder *mukhiya* stopped Jit Bahadur and asked him why he was going to Khandbari. When he was briefed on the situation, the *mukhiya* apparently said that he would pay Rs. 15,000 for that land. Jit Bahadur agreed, informed the Brahman, and went to Khandbari with the *mukhiya* the next day. The *mukhiya* did not buy the land, rather, he sold it to a Newar and gave Jit Bahadur only Rs. 500. He assured Jit Bahadur that he would pay off all of his debt quickly. The next

day, Jit Bahadur went to the *mukhiya*'s house and gave him the information about the debts that he owed others, which was Rs. 10,600. The *mukhiya* promised to pay his debts and to give him the remaining Rs. 3,900 to him. He paid the debts, but never paid the rest of the money.

One day, Jit Bahadur's wife went to the *mukhiya*'s house and asked for some grain during a famine (*anikal*). Jit Bahadur recalled that the *mukhiya* gave them almost 20 kgs. of maize. Jit Bahadur has recently learned that the *mukhiya* wants to take the remainder of his land after his death, because he has a Rs. 60,000 bond paper, which is supposedly owed by Jit Bahadur. But Jit Bahadur has never borrowed money from the *mukhiya*. Once, when Jit Bahadur asked the *mukhiya* about it, he replied that his wife had borrowed the money. Jit Bahadur said, "she took only 20 kgs of maize from you, as I remember, whereas you were supposed to pay me Rs. 3,900. Isn't that so?" The *mukhiya* became angry and said that he had a Rs. 60,000 bond paper which Jit Bahadur had signed. Jit Bahadur became speechless. As an illiterate farmer, he felt as though he could not speak in front of the *mukhiya* and could not prove otherwise. Therefore, he just said "please *mukhiya*, release me from the bond paper, I have not borrowed any money." Jit Bahadur said that the *mukhiya* did not care.

When I asked the *mukhiya* about Jit Bahadur's case, he laughed, saying, "did Jite (using a diminutive of Jit Bahadur's name) also complain to you? Nonsense Jite." Looking at Jit Bahadur's expression and appearance, it appeared as though the *mukhiya* really had plundered him. I asked Jit Bahadur whether or not he had had other similar experiences.

He told me about another event. After the airport construction, many non-Kumals had settled in the area. Once, a Newar shopkeeper invited him to a dinner. He served him delicious food and alcohol. The elder *mukhiya*'s son was also there. They asked Jit Bahadur for two pieces of homestead land, one for the Newar and another for the Chhetri. Jit Bahadur said that it was better to have the discussion about land at another time. But they served him more alcohol and forced him to make an agreement, giving him Rs. 50 as an advance payment and putting his thumbprints on a paper. Later they said that Jit Bahadur had taken Rs. 5,000 as payment for the land and they eventually took the land. "They gave me fifty rupees and made a bond paper of Rs. 5,000, adding two zeros," Jit Bahadur realized now. At one point, Jit Bahadur showed me the land, which was in the main bazaar and was worth almost Rs. 300,000 at that time.

Box 3: Prem Bahadur Kumal loses all his farmland

Case B: Prem Bahadur Kumal (a 62-year old man) has a small hut in Dhale *gaun*. He has only homestead land and works as a sharecropper, a butcher and as a porter. He expressed very negative attitudes towards non-Kumals. During a discussion, he told me the reason that he had such a negative opinion, was that he had been cheated very badly by non-Kumals a few years previously. The treacherous had taken advantage of his illiteracy when he was a ward member of the local *panchayat*. He told me the story:

“One day, as a ward member, I was invited to Magar *gaun*. Suruman Kumal had agreed to buy land from Raharman Kumal for Rs. 10,000. Ganga Bahadur Tamang, Bishnu Bahadur Tamang, and Khadananda Gautam were also invited. They wrote an agreement paper and acted as witnesses. Being a ward member, I also signed (with thumbprints) the paper as a witness. Suruman paid the money to Raharman in front of us.

After two years, I got a summons letter from the District Court, saying that I had to go there within a week. I went to the court the next day. I thought that I had been called as a ward member. When I was informed of the case, I was stunned. How could I have imagined my neighbours having done this? Later, I realized that I had fallen into a trap made by Tamangs and Gautam the Brahman, who had been invited to write up the agreement paper and to witness Suruman and Raharman's transaction. These people had placed my thumbprints on a blank piece of paper, and later wrote that I, Prem Bahadur, had sold my 18 *ropani khet* (irrigated land) and 32 *ropani bari* (dried land) at Rs. 80,000.

My land was close to the main road on the eastern border of the airport. As an illiterate man, I had not understood their plan and I had put my thumbprints on the paper as a ward member. Later, those same people claimed in court that ‘Prem Bahadur has not vacated the land, which he had already sold to us. Therefore, we want to take back our money or the land.’ Was this not a terrible crime against me?”

After that, he registered an appeal in the court. But due to the lack of documentation, money for bribes (*ghus*) and relatives with power who could help, he lost this land.⁷ He even went to the appellate court in Dhankuta, but he lost the case there too. He thinks that because he could not pay *ghus*, the court did not look upon him favorably. Later, he paid Rs. 7,000 for just homestead land. He had basically become landless through the non-Kumals' treachery after airport construction. He said, “even as a ward member, I faced this trouble with them. Now you can imagine how common people are living in the face of such tricky people.”

airport, they settled down in Tumlingtar and made it a central access point for transportation. The non-Kumals found that the honest, simple, and uneducated Kumals were communal and easily trusted everyone. The new immigrants were clever, educated and more individualistic. They took advantage of the situation. Socio-culturally, the new Brahman, Chhetri, Newar and Tamang immigrants had a higher social rank whereas Kumals were considered subordinate to them. Non-Kumals established relationship networks among themselves and with the state bureaucrats. Through these relationships they became economically and politically powerful. Thus, the Kumals had to face powerful competitors in Tumlingtar after airport construction.

The Arun III Hydroelectric Project

According to Kumals, the Arun III Hydroelectric Project was another misfortune. Along with dam construction at Faksinda (40 kms. north of Tumlingtar), an office and a storehouse were constructed in Tumlingtar on about 300 *ropani* of land because it was an easily accessible area. The project also started construction of a wide motorable road from Hile to Khandbari. This project helped to accelerate the process of land grabbing from the Kumals by non-Kumals, and Kumals lost a great deal of land for a second time (see Appendix: 2). Businessmen, government staff from the district headquarters, and people from the surrounding areas were attracted to and settled down in Tumlingtar because of the access to the airport, the weekly market and employment opportunities. These people accumulated Kumal land through various means. It was rare for people to pay cash for Kumal land. What more often transpired was that they would lend money to Kumals, then increase the interest, and after a few years grab the land. Sometimes it happened that others would first register the land in the office and come to claim it later.

Although the Arun III Hydroelectric Project was cancelled by the government in 1996, the process of land redistribution from Kumals to non-Kumals still continued during my fieldwork. The non-Kumals were lending money to Kumals at high interest rates and taking their land. The Kumals were mortgaging land and falling into debt during festivals, rituals, and famines. Many Kumals who gamble and drink alcohol had also fallen into debt. Recently, a few families have borrowed money in order to be able to go to Gulf countries as labourers. Here I present two cases, which are connected to unexpected consequences of the Arun III Hydroelectric Project.

From these two narratives, we can see the impact of the airport in this community. First, a large number of people arrived in the region due to the

Box 4: Padam Bahadur Kumal gets cheated by a non-Kumal

Case A: Padam Bahadur Kumal (a 66-year old man) of Magar *gaun* was known throughout Tumlingtar as a rich man, but he has lost most of his land now. The Arun III Project constructed a storehouse close to his land and many people were attracted to his land for settlement. Dil Bahadur Magar⁸ of the neighboring Jhyaunpokhari village came to Padam Bahadur's house in December 1994 and convinced him to sell all of his land except for his homestead land. Dil Bahadur promised to give him Rs. 400,000 cash and 20 *ropani khet* somewhere else. Padam Bahadur agreed. Dil Bahadur then sold most of the land and earned Rs. 700,000, but never paid the money and never bought the *khet* land for Padam Bahadur. Once, Padam Bahadur asked Dil Bahadur about the *khet* land and the money. Dil Bahadur showed him 30 *ropani khet* land owned by a Chhetri. He said that he wanted to buy that land for Padam Bahadur, but that he had only Rs. 200,000 and the price of the land was Rs. 300,000. Padam Bahadur liked the *khet* and went to Khandbari to mortgage his homestead land at Rs. 100,000 in order to give this amount to Dil Bahadur to buy the *khet* land from the Chhetri.

Padam Bahadur continued the story, "I was happy with Dil Bahadur then because I thought that I would have the productive *khet* land as well as Rs. 400,000 soon. I believed that he would pay my money when he had sold all of my original land. But he sold all the land and never handed over the *khet* land or the money. Rather, he stopped coming to my house. I became worried and went with my son to his house, but he was not there. Then, we went to the Chhetri's house to find out about the *khet* land. The Chhetri informed us that he had no intention of selling his land and he also told us to be careful with Dil Bahadur.⁹ Then, I got suspicious of Dil Bahadur. I went to the Chief District Officer (CDO) and registered a complaint letter against him. This was in 1998."

According to Padam Bahadur, Dil Bahadur disappeared from the village for a year. Policemen eventually caught him in Dhankuta in October 1999 and they informed Padam Bahadur of the arrest. As a researcher I also accompanied Padam Bahadur to the CDO office. We found out then that more than 10 people had registered similar complaints against Dil Bahadur. He had apparently taken their money and land without compensation. The entire crowd and a few policemen went to Dil Bahadur's house. I also accompanied them. We found that Dil Bahadur had nothing in his house. He had only a small house and homestead land, to support two wives, a few children, and his parents. The CDO sentenced him to one year in prison for his crime.

Padam Bahadur had become landless. He cursed both the Arun III project and the treacherous Dil Bahadur Magar. He is facing a very hard life these days.

Box 5: A Kumal turns landless by mortgaging it

Case B: One day, when I was collecting information from the Land and Taxation Office in Khandbari, Nara Bahadur Kumal was there. He had mortgaged 20 *ropani* of land, for which he had received a loan of Rs. 90,000 from Devi Thapa, a Chhetri teacher of a neighboring village. Nara Bahadur had borrowed this money at 3% interest rate per month. According to Nara Bahadur, he had mortgaged the land because his grandson wanted to go to Saudi Arabia.

After two months, I heard that Tirth Bahadur (Nara Bahadur's grandson) had returned to Tumlingtar from Kathmandu because he failed the medical test necessary to become a labourer in Saudi Arabia. I asked Tirth Bahadur about the money. He said that he had used up Rs. 50,000 for his own sake. I asked Nara Bahadur about the mortgaged land. He said that the money is his grandson's responsibility because the land is for him. During my fieldwork, I saw Tirth Bahadur many times, roaming around the village with new clothes and drinking alcohol. He did not bother about the land and the loan money.

Devi Thapa told the researcher that he knew Nara Bahadur would not return his money, as it is a large amount. But, he was not worried about it because land in Tumlingtar is valuable and he could easily sell it for a good price.

Due to the Arun III project, non-Kumal immigrants were attracted to Tumlingtar. They gradually grabbed the Kumals' land through various ways and settled there. The project also helped to develop weekly markets, offices, hotels, lodges and grocery shops in Tumlingtar, which introduced a modern cash economy into the community. This cash economy and the weekly market were introduced and established in Tumlingtar due to the influx of many people after establishment of the Arun III Hydroelectric Project.

Makalu-Barun Conservation Area Project

Although the project site is about 40 kms north of Tumlingtar, I found some impacts from the Makalu-Barun Conservation Area Project in my study area. Along with the establishment of the conservation area, the Makalu peak has been opened for expeditions and thus attracts tourists to the region. Tumlingtar is considered a beautiful place and is convenient for those who fly from Kathmandu or Biratnagar to the mountain. During the autumn and spring, Makalu peak can be seen from Tumlingtar and people can camp on the banks of the Arun and Sabha rivers.

Tumlingtar became part of the Khandbari municipality due to its population growth and the need for increased facilities like electricity, drinking water, and telephones. As a result of the availability of these physical facilities and because it's a tourist destination, businessmen arrived in Tumlingtar and established teashops, groceries, clothing stores, and

lodges. During my fieldwork, a resort was being constructed under a joint venture between a Japanese person and a Nepali person buying Kumal land. A boarding school and some government offices had also been established in Tumlingtar in response to increased population and the development activities in the region. Indeed, all of the new immigrants' houses, their hotels, lodges and groceries, as well as all of the offices were established on Kumal land. The Kumals had lost a great deal of land and as a result are currently subsisting through portering. When they became involved in portering, they further lost their remaining land and other property because of the treachery and cheating of the businessmen. The following case illustrates the situation.

Box 6: Illiterate Kumals get cheated when they borrow money

Case A: One day, I was filling out a household survey form at Bhim Bahadur's house in Sanguri village. A Chhetri came from the airport area and sat near me. I stopped working. He asked lady of the house for her husband, Bhim Bahadur. She replied, "he has gone for portering." The Chhetri had a grocery and a restaurant in the airport area. He got angry and said to the woman "you have to pay the money because you took rice, lentils and oil from my shop." She replied, "I will send my husband when he comes back." The Chhetri threatened that he would claim the land if she didn't pay.

He left and I followed him. Along the way, I asked how much Bhim Bahadur had to pay. "Almost ten thousand," he replied. "He borrowed money, rice, and oil and drank some beer too, but he never paid," he continued. According to the Chhetri, Bhim Bahadur is borrowing food and other items from another shop now. I went to Bhim Bahadur's house the following day and asked about the debt to the Chhetri. Bhim Bahadur said that he was supposed to pay one thousand rupees, but did not pay because the Chbetri claimed that he owed him ten thousand rupees. The problem was not solved during my fieldwork, but it seems likely that the Chhetri will grab his land soon.

Box 7: The Kumal's loss of land for borrowing small amounts from local moneylenders

Case B: During my stay at the Arun Hotel, I saw many Kumals who came to borrow rice, lentils, oil, kerosene, spices and fishing hooks. I found one man busy providing these items and making notes on a piece of paper. Mukte Kumal, who was 38 years old and living at the inn after having lost his property five years previously, told me that businessmen write 100 for 10 and 500 for 50 and also charge high interest rates on the money. Kumals are unable to pay back the money, but they are compelled to continue borrowing from these businessmen because of lack of other sources.

Once, Mukte had borrowed Rs. 500 from Mitra Bahadur Khatri and paid with his 7 *ropani* of land. He still could not get rid of the debt and worked for 2 years as a servant in Mitra Bahadur's house. He also told me that they never receive wages in cash for their work, instead the high caste people pay in kind. Nonetheless, they later insist that Kumals have taken more goods than the value of the wages. They then make them sign bond papers and later take their land.

These cases are representative stories of some of the impact of the hotels, lodges and groceries as well as the Makalu-Barun Conservation Area Project and other interventions, which have appeared in Tumlingtar as *bikash*. Non-Kumals came to the region due to *bikash* and seized the Kumals' land through various means. This is similar to the situation that Caplan (1970) found in Limbuwan. According to Caplan, a Brahman would invite a Limbu to his house, provide good food and get the Limbu to put thumbprints on paper if he borrowed a little money. Later, when the Limbu came to pay, the Brahman would say that it was not enough and would take his land.

Community Forestry Programme

A community forestry programme was introduced in Tumlingtar in 1994-96, when natural regeneration of the forests had stopped. Forest degradation had been out of control due to the heavy use of forest products. Community forestry programmes entail overall government control, but local forest management by community user groups. The users are responsible for protection and plantation, as well as for the control of forest consumption (Chhetri 1993). There are five forests in Tumlingtar and all have been handed over to the users (see Appendix: 2). Kumals claim that this *bikash* activity is also a misfortune for them. They claim that it has restricted their use of forest products and clay collection, thereby stopping the pottery business. Indeed, most of the clay mines are on the Arun riverbanks, located inside the community forests. The Kumal's traditionally unrestricted forest product and clay collection practices have been prohibited by the User Group Committee (UGC). Thus the introductions of community forest practices have had an impact on the Kumal's traditional occupation.

Today, the forest conditions are improving due to regeneration and protection. Still, some people have been extracting fuel wood, fodder and timber. Most of the firewood sellers are collecting firewood from the same forests. My Kumal informants claim that the forests were not degraded before the arrival of the new groups and development activities. Along with the arrival of new groups, competition for resources started. They claim that some powerful people are still exploiting the forests as common property and earning private profit. This resonates with Hardin's (1985) statement that

when the forest was under the Kumals, it was regulated by the community and was well protected, but it became degraded when it became open for all groups.

During discussions on the forest issue, it appeared that one group was blaming the others for causing forest destruction. According to the Kumals, non-Kumals have built big wooden houses, hotels, lodges, restaurants and offices and decorated them with wooden furniture. The non-Kumals argued that the Kumals destroyed the forests, because they needed a lot of firewood for clay pot baking. When I estimated fuel requirement and use, I found that 1kg. of firewood is essential for one clay pot baking, but that few the Kumals are currently involved in this occupation. The hotels, lodges, restaurants and teashops of Tumlingtar are using 580 kgs. of firewood daily. Additionally, I did not identify a single wooden chair or window in the Kumals' houses whereas all of non-Kumal houses had carved windows and doors.

There were also differences among the Kumals and non-Kumals in terms of resource use. The Kumal ritual beliefs regulated their practices and resources. Forest products were harvested one after another through arranging rituals (*puja*) before and after the use of resources. They followed the 7 Srawan and 1 Tuesday practice, according to which no forest resources should be used on 8 specified days in a month based on the Hindu calendar. But the non-Kumal Hindus held the belief that since they were the offspring of seven brothers, they did not have to follow the 7 Srawan and 1 Tuesday practice. The Kumal informants emphasized that they rarely use the sawn timber, whereas non-Kumals use only sawn timber. They claimed that when the forests were handed over as community forests, only the Kumals continued to follow the government rules because they are afraid of violating rules. During my fieldwork, I noted that many young non-Kumals were extracting timber from the forests during the night and selling them in the market area.

The Kumals were fulfilling their need for firewood and timber by collecting driftwood from the summer floods and using maize husks and sorghum stumps for fuel wood. One day, Phaudalal Kumal (an elderly man of 81) summarized the situation by saying: "*samudaik ban bhaneko afule afailai borama halnu rahechha.*" This translates to: 'the community forest programme means tightening ourselves in a sack.' This reflects the impossibility of the situation faced by Kumals within the context of the community forestry programme. It appears that the high caste non-Kumals—the Brahmans, Chhetris and Newars—are using the forest resources as they wish. The following event elaborates this case.

Box 8: The local elites cheat Kumals, grab their resources and even manipulate the law

On October 25, I joined a crowd gathered outside Devi Gautam's house.¹⁰ There were three policemen, two forest rangers, two guards and some villagers. Devi was handcuffed and was being taken to the police post by the policemen. The crowd was following them. A ranger asked Devi, "How much timber did you sell illegally this year?" Devi replied, "I didn't sell any pieces of timber illegally. You can check the records." The ranger replied, "We have checked and we are going to check your house now." Another ranger was writing up the case against him. They had come to his house and had found 700 cubic feet (cft.) of timber, which they seized and took to the police post.

The ranger declared that Gautam had illegally extracted 1,850 cft. of timber that year. Mentioned in the case was that a boarding school had bought 300 cft., the Makalu Resort had bought 200 cft., and they had seized 700 cft. that day. Brahmatal Tamang, the chairman of the Forest Users Group Committee said that Gautam had chopped 50 *saal* (*Shorea robusta*) trees that year, but he had thought it was legal because Gautam had formally applied before sawing the timber.

Later, we came to know from Brahmatal that the issue revolved around two Kumals' application for timber. Brahmatal had seen the applications a few months previously. He discovered that Gautam had approved the applications and had taken the timber in their names. The Kumals denied any knowledge of this. The UGC checked the Kumals' houses and confirmed that the vice-chairman had cheated them. Before disclosing the treachery of the vice-chairman, the UGC demanded Rs. 7,000 compensation for this crime. But the vice-chairman objected and the case was forwarded to the District Forest Office (DFO).

Eventually, the ranger prepared the documents to send Gautam to jail for one year and the case was forwarded to the DFO with a fine of Rs. 18,500. But, all of the respected, high caste, non-Kumal people in the area present at that time, like the *mukhiyas*, the chief ward member, and hotel owners requested the government officials to settle the case locally since it was a first time offence. Later, I learned that Gautam had provided alcohol and meat and had paid Rs. 7,000 as *ghus* to the rangers and was released immediately. He also paid Rs. 3,000 to the UGC (see Appendix 3). After this incident, an elderly Kumal commented that, "if the vice-chairman had been a Kumal, he would have died in jail and nobody would have helped him, but the rangers released him easily because they are all *uchha jat* (high caste group)."

People from the high caste groups occupy most government positions, and in case of problems, they favor one another. Indeed, they have used this power to exploit the poor people, the Kumals. This case also suggests that the

Kumals are directly and indirectly exploited by high caste groups in the context of the community forestry programme.

These above mentioned development activities are the primary factors that have contributed to Kumals being marginalized from their traditional occupation and from their land. Other factors have also indirectly and directly affected Kumals very negatively. These factors relate to non-Kumals and government policies.

Other Factors Contributing to the Kumals' Marginalization

There are less directly visible factors that also negatively affect the Kumals of Tumlingtar. I call them internal factors, and they play key roles during contact between Kumals and non-Kumals. The non-Kumals commonly refer to the Kumals as *lata* (simple), *jangali* (wild) and *pakhe* (rustic). These are demeaning terms from which a number of meanings can be implied from the broader context. First, is that Kumals live far from the other groups. Second, that they are simple, honest and more dependable than other groups.

Status of Education (Literacy): Historically in Nepali Hindu society, high caste people were the only people officially allowed to acquire education. In fact, low caste people were restricted from both hearing and reading of some religious mantras and prayers. As is the case in much of Nepal, schools are a relatively recent phenomenon in Tumlingtar. Before the arrival of non-Kumals, there was no school in Tumlingtar. None of the Kumals felt the necessity of formal education. Just three hours walking distance away in Dingla, the first Sanskrit school in Nepal was established. However, even now, there are some Kumals who are not conscious of the need for education. Rather than sending their children to school, they send them to go fishing and herding. A common saying among the Kumals in this area is: '*padyo gunyo ke kam halo jotyo khayo mam.*' This saying captures the belief that it is better to plough fields to get food instead of investing time in education.

Conversely, the local high caste people have been sending their children to Dharan and Kathmandu for better schooling. Dhan Bahadur Kumal (a 56-year old man) told me that during his childhood, they were not allowed to get an education. He recalled a story related to his desire to become literate. In fact, he was learning the alphabet with a Chhetri from his village, but a Brahman found out and threatened him. This man apparently warned Dhan Bahadur that he shouldn't be clever (*batho*), or the government would jail him. It is true that the Rana autocracy did not permit everyone to be educated, so Dhan Bahadur stopped his learning.

The Kumals have historically been uneducated and illiterate, contributing to their dependence on non-Kumals. The so-called high caste Brahmans, Chhetris and Newars were historically more educated and were the bond paper writers for transactions such as land mortgaging and money lending.

Among the nine people writing bond papers during my fieldwork period, I found two Brahmans, two Chhetris (including the *mukhiya*), two Tamangs and three Newars. These people all owned relatively more land than other community members. Given that the majority of the cases referred to above have been perpetrated by these people, it appears that they have taken advantage of Kumals during the land registration and had taken the Kumals' land as their own property.

Influence of Panchayat Leaders and High Caste People in Local Politics:

During the *panchayat* era, a Chhetri was recognized as the area *mukhiya* and was the *pradhanpancha* (*panchayat* chairman) for a long time. The *mukhiya* became stronger than the local *Thari* family¹¹ and influenced the local community through the *panchayat*. When these non-Kumals became local *mukhiya*, they used local resources to their own advantage. They cultivated the Kumals' pastureland in Khakuwa, cleared some bush land in Gidde and converted all of it into agricultural land in their own names. They restricted access to the clay mines, which were located on non-Kumal land. The Kumal *jimmuwal*¹² was ineffective because he was illiterate and dominated by the *Thari* Brahmans.

Most of the local government leaders have been chosen from non-Kumal groups and they favor non-Kumals in disputes. Even now, not a single Kumal has been elected to a major political position and no Kumal political leaders have non-Kumal supporters and followers. The non-Kumals are spread across various political parties, occupying the most powerful positions. Positions of power in the municipality and district governments are also occupied by high caste peoples who decide in their own community's favour. The chief ward member and other ward members are always non-Kumals, and have replaced the role of *gaubudas*¹³ in the Kumal community.

Credit System and the Kumal Indebtedness: The Kumals have become increasingly economically dependent upon non-Kumals, especially after the changing of land ownership and registration. A cadastral survey was undertaken to measure the land and there was a small fee charged per *ropani* for registration. Some Kumals had no money to pay for land registration and ended up mortgaging the lands. Others borrowed money from non-Kumals and became indebted at high interest rates. The above mentioned *bikash* activities resulted in seizure of some of their lands. Reduced agricultural production further put them into debt. The Kumals tend to take loans during festivals, rituals, famine and illness. Others borrow money in order to send their relatives to Saudi Arabia to look for employment opportunities. Some become indebted due to habits like drinking and gambling. The non-Kumals lend money at interest rates as high as 36%.¹⁴

The Kumals told me about numerous cases whereby the creditors would provide them with small loans, and after obtaining thumbprints, would add a

few extra zeros to the amount. They claim that grocery owners and other creditors are adding zeros to bond papers and thus plundering Kumals. If Kumals refuse to pay the debts, the creditors forward the cases to local leaders, who tend to favour the high caste creditors. In most cases the debtors are unable to settle their debts and therefore end up losing their mortgaged land.

I observed that most Kumals borrowed grain from the local groceries daily. They were generally not in a position to pay for this food and eventually would end up paying with their land. I also found that when non-Kumals borrowed from Kumals, they generally did not pay interest (see Appendix 3) and they generally requested the money for a short period (like one week) in the beginning, but only paid either after a much longer time or sometimes not at all. One day, the elder *mukhiya* laughingly told me that he had visited Kumal villages several times and found out about Kumal money and other property (gold and silver). He advised that they should keep their property in his house for security. He told me that he could easily convince Kumals to store their valuables at his house, as they were afraid of thieves entering their doorless houses. When Kumals brought property for safekeeping, he lent it out to other Kumals at a high interest rate.

Influence of High Caste Groups in Bureaucracy: As illiterate and less powerful people, Kumals have little influence over government bureaucracy. Except for one policeman and two teachers, none of the Kumals in this area have jobs in government offices. In most of the district offices: the Court, the Land and Taxation Office, the Land Measurement Office, the Chief District Office, the municipality and other public offices, officials are people of high caste. The high caste people and their money (*ghus*) are influencing political culture, bureaucracy and public offices. Corruption (*bhrastachar*) and bribes (*ghus*) are common and became open after the restoration of democracy in 1991. Without *ghus*, no official transaction is done. I witnessed an incident in which an official from the Land Measurement Office charged Rs. 150 for a Rs. 17 map from a Rai farmer who had walked for two days with the Rs. 50 that others had told him to be the price for the map. The official told him that the price had increased and the farmer went back home to bring more money.

Education is needed in order to gain government employment. Passing the School Leaving Certificate (S.L.C.) examination is the minimum requirement for even the lowest positions. However, only 10 Kumals in Tumlingtar possess this qualification. Eighty percent of Nepali government bureaucrats in the area are Brahman, Chhetri, Newar or from the Tarai, and they tend to favour their own groups in order to increase their relationship networks.

The situation is the same in politics. Most political party leaders are high caste people. Many government bureaucrats are also involved in politics in order that they can acquire higher positions when their political party is in

power. One Kumal teacher was transferred from Uling (two days walking distance) to Tumlingtar (close to his house) during the Communist-led government of 1995. The local *mukhiya* did not like him because the teacher opposed some of his attitudes. I found out that the *mukhiya* wanted the teacher to be transferred away from the district and the District Education Officer wanted to post one of his relatives to the school, therefore, they colluded and replaced the Kumal teacher with another teacher from the Tarai. Most of the younger generation of high caste groups of Tumlingtar are working in government offices in the district as well as in other regions. Some Kumals with similar qualifications are unable to get these jobs and must resort to agricultural and day-labour work.

Conclusion

Pigg (1993) contends that development activities barely touch the lives of many Nepali people. My study findings suggest that Kumals in Tumlingtar are touched by development, albeit in what they identify as negative ways. The first inhabitants of Tumlingtar, the Kumals, became communal landholders (*kipatiya*) and pottery makers. Later, the state introduced various development activities (e.g., the airport, the Arun III Hydroelectric Project, the road, the community forestry programme) that displaced Kumals from their habitat and their occupation. They thus changed gradually from potters to porters and labourers. Political decisions, state policy, and state economic activities have affected Kumals, shaping their livelihood patterns. High caste people first arrived in Tumlingtar as agents of the *panchayat* government and influenced local politics. Other high caste groups appeared later, when Tumlingtar developed as a market center. These people accelerated the marginalization process of the Kumals by accumulating Kumal land and other property. Furthermore, more subtle, or internal, factors also played a role during the contact between Kumals and non-Kumals. These internal factors are equally important as the external factors that displaced Kumals from their landholding positions.

Although this research was carried out in a small community and with a small group of people, it has raised some serious questions about the effects of development more generally: Does development necessarily marginalize low caste or less powerful social groups? Can development be implemented equally for all? Questions such as these will need to be part of future research agenda in the field of development in general.

Notes

1. Tumlingtar is under Khandbari municipality, comprised of a large plain area situated within the Arun Valley. It is located in Sankhuwasabha district of Eastern Nepal. Arun is one of the deepest valleys of the world and is located just 80 kms. east of the world's highest peak, Mount Everest.

2. The words 'north' and 'south' are commonly used in post-colonial development discourse. 'North' denotes the developed countries of Europe and America, which had colonial power in the southern countries. The 'north' is also often referred to as the 'first world,' and the 'south' as the 'third world.'
3. The word Limbuwan refers to a region in between the Anun and Tamor rivers in east Nepal which presently fall under Koshi and Mechi zones. This is the principal land of the Limbu ethnic group before Nepal was unified.
4. *Mukhiya* means 'village leader' in Nepali. Generally, Chhetris and Magars are *mukhiya* in this particular area.
5. Gobindapur is situated in the Morang district of the Tarai, almost one week's walking distance from Tumlingtar. It is bush-land located on the Dans river.
6. The names of individuals used in this paper are pseudonyms.
7. The court made its decision based on evidence of the pre-1994 bond papers, because the land had not been previously measured and there were no pre-existing land holding certificates.
8. A pseudonym for the maternal uncle of Padam Bahadur's daughter-in-law.
9. The Chhetri said that Dil Bahadur was known in his village for his tricks and that he had cheated many people.
10. Devi Gautam was the vice chairman of the Hokse-Piple community forest and one of my Brahman informants.
11. *Thari* was a position given by state during pre-Panchayat era to assist Jimmuwal for tax collection, dispute settlement, etc.
12. A *panchayat* era tax collection position which was given to a local leader by the government.
13. A position given by the villagers, to someone respected as the village leader.
14. The interest rate of the banks and other such institutions tends to be less than 18%.

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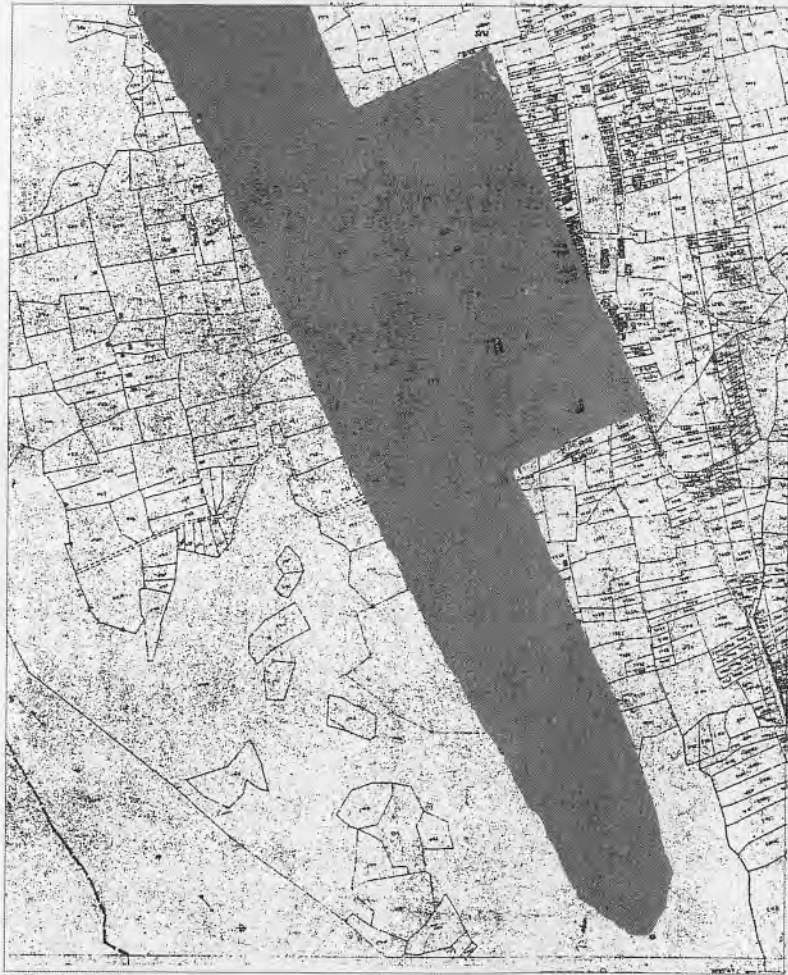
Appendices:

Appendix 1: Cadastral Map showing Tumlingtar airport and the agricultural land.

Map 3

Khandabari Municipality - 13, Tumlingtar
The Study Area

SHANKHUWASABHA DISTRICT

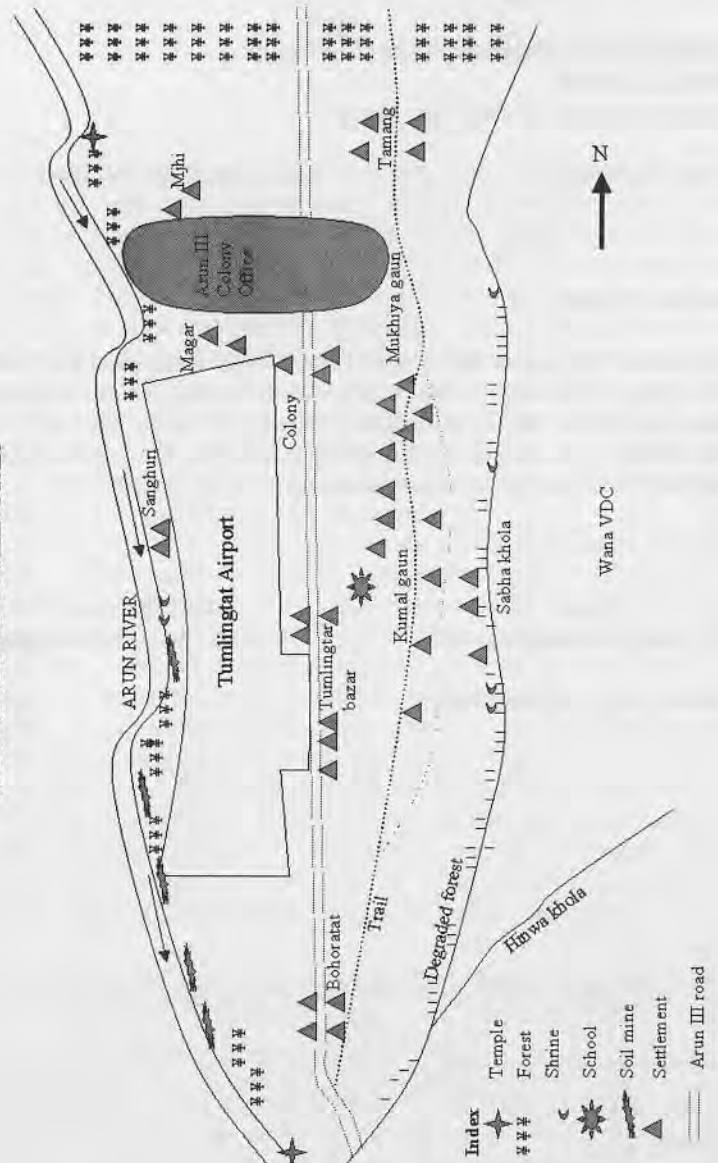


1. Small plots are the individual's land and settlement of Tumlingtar
2. The big plot at the centre shows the airport. This was the main productive land of the Kumals before airport construction.

Appendix 2: Map showing the airport, Arun III project office, forest, river, etc.

Map 2

SKETCH MAP OF TUMLINGTAR



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

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

Letter No: 056/057

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

Subject: Payment

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

Payee
Mr. Durga Prasad Gautam

Receiver
Mr. Jagat Bahadur Karki

Source: Jagat Bahadur Karki

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

**Sanjeev K. Pokharel
Ram B. Chhetri**

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Source: Field Survey 2000