

FOREST PLACES, POLITICAL SPACES: THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF  
COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN NEPAL

by

CHRISTOPHER BLAIR TARNOWSKI

(Under the Direction of Robert E. Rhoades)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines a number of overlapping social and political implications associated with the implementation of Nepal's Community Forestry Program. Based on several of the broad concerns of a post-structural political ecology, and inspired by the work of Foucault, Escobar, Ferguson, Scott, and others, this study combines an examination of the policies and practices of the state, development and forest management with the myriad ways in which villagers adopt, embrace, manipulate, redefine, and/or reconfigure community forestry as it is put into practice at the local level. The study is divided into two sections. The chapters of the first section explore the histories associated with the emergence and growth of the Nepal state, the expansion of development, and the changes in forest policy culminating in the current policy and practices associated with community forestry. Community forestry policy is seen to represent the devolution or 'decentralization' of management control to local communities. Through an examination of the practices associated with community forest management, this section argues, however, that contrary to claims of 'decentralizing' control, forest resources and the rural population are subject to an expanding apparatus of 'governmental' control. The second section of this study is based on fieldwork conducted among three user groups in a single 'village' setting, and situates local management practices within the context of an expanding state and the proliferation of numerous development imperatives. The chapters of this section highlight several aspects of social difference – caste and ethnic group membership, gender, wealth, education – that have salience for the outcome(s) associated with community forestry as put into practice. Despite a diverse set of objectives to foster 'participation' and 'empowerment' of women, poor and other disadvantaged 'community' members, to promote 'democracy,' and simultaneously 'depoliticize' community forestry, this study suggests that the community forestry program has instead opened a new political space within which local economic and political elite are able to expand their power and authority over forest management and local community development within the village.

INDEX WORDS: Nepal, Community Forestry, Community-based resource  
management, Development, Politics, Political Ecology

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BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT IN NEPAL

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## **DEDICATION**

To GMT  
For Everything

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Inquiry into the role of development in Nepal, should not be limited to asking the questions development institutions themselves ask.*

Stacy Leigh Pigg (1993: 45)

Spread across a remarkably varied landscape, Nepal's forests have long been considered a vital resource: to the majority of the populace, more than 90% of whom are primarily subsistence farmers who continue to be dependent on forest products for their livelihoods; to the state, which has sought to control and exploit forests as a source of revenue for more than a century. More recently, environmental and development interests has been added to those of rural villagers and the state. Nepal's current forest policies, and the considerable changes, reformulations and permutations they have undergone, are reflective of a great deal more than the value of forests as a resource to be exploited. The history of Nepal's Community Forestry Program reveals the rise (and plateau) of environmental concerns, shifts in development theory and practice, and the ever-increasing role of foreign donors and bi-laterally funded development projects in shaping Nepal's national forest policies and management regimes. Yet, Nepal's forest policies are not only products, but productive. The translation of forest policies into practice is, obviously, a means to directly shape how forests are protected, managed, and used. But perhaps not so apparent, forest policies in Nepal have become a means to introduce social and institutional changes - indeed, to create new institutions - that have a

bearing on Nepali society in ways far removed from the natural resource management sector. Whereas forests once served primarily as a source of fuelwood, fodder, or timber, or as a source of revenue for the state, they have become, through a multi-faceted history, sites of and for ‘development’ and ‘democracy.’

In 1989 His Majesty’s Government of Nepal released its Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, a collection of policy guidelines that for many represents a major shift in forest management policy, legislation, and practice. It is easy to understand why this document is so often cited by those working in and researching Nepal’s community forestry program, since it is quite explicit about the privilege accorded the role of ‘communities’ in community forestry:

Phased handing over of all the accessible hill forests to the communities, to the extent that they are able and willing to manage them.

... To entrust the users with the task of protecting and managing the forests. The users to receive all of the income.... (Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, HMG 1990: 14, quoted in Gilmour & Fisher 1991: 15)

It would be easy to read the release of the Master Plan as visionary, as some kind of turning point or paradigmatic shift, or as an overturning of old regimes of forest management in favor of more ‘modern’ practices and policies. It would be equally convenient to accept the Master Plan as simply the product of a collection of enlightened Nepali foresters and bureaucrats. However, none of these readings of the Master Plan would adequately encompass the constellation of influences, historical, political and inter-/transnational, which have come to shape the emergence and current direction(s) of community-based forest management in Nepal.

Similarly, it is hard to imagine how anyone could have anticipated, given the basic clarity and precise scope of the Master Plan, as well as previous policies and



legislation, that community forestry could have blossomed into such a highly fertile site of cultural production. In this respect, I am referring to the tremendous transformation in the myriad ways in which “community forestry” is understood, defined, envisaged.

Narayan Kaji Shrestha (2001: 62), for example, arguably Nepal’s most outspoken advocate of community forestry, recently wrote that:

The community forestry movement in Nepal carries hope for sustaining democracy and alleviating poverty through sustainable resource management.... So community forestry is not just the regeneration of forests and the supply of forestry products to meet the needs of local users, important as this may be. It is also a process and campaign that supports democratic principles by allowing local users to make decisions by consensus. Thus it has become a school to practice democracy, gender balance, equity, social justice, respect for diversity, good governance, as well as sustainable resource management.<sup>1</sup>

As we will see, these are only some of the issues that are now being pursued through the implementation of community-based forest management in Nepal.

Alarm over the destruction of forests has increasingly, over the past four decades, drawn together a number of seemingly disparate environmental, social, and development concerns, or ‘crises.’ Attempts to address many of these diverse concerns have culminated in the proliferation of community-based programs being carried out throughout the world, in both ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ nations alike. The emergence of community-based forest management in Nepal represents a similar multifaceted trajectory in which several environmental and development imperatives have converged. In parallel to several recent development trends transpiring globally, Nepal’s attempts to sustainably manage and conserve its forests and other natural resources have

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<sup>1</sup> These comments are a distillation of much of the conversation I had with Dr. Shrestha a year previously, in the spring of 2000, in which we discussed the “political” nature of community forestry; i.e., the degree to which community forestry had become a program dedicated to instilling democratic ideas and practices.

merged with attempts to meet local villager's subsistence needs, improve living standards and eradicate rural poverty, promote the empowerment of women and other disadvantaged groups, while also reducing economic and political inequality, and more lately, to create and strengthen local democratic institutions, and foster 'decentralization' and 'good governance'. That community forestry has merged with these other 'development' interests, all largely donor driven (and by no means confined to community forestry, or to Nepal's development landscape), speaks to the power of the international development apparatus. Thus overall, the history of the emergence of community-based forest management reveals forty years of transformation in national forest policy woven through with the influences wrought by an influx of development assistance and foreign aid since the 1950s, and more recently by the proliferation of international, national and local environmental NGOs.

In many respects, this dissertation is a study of contradictions. Community forestry is a development program borne out of a narrow environmental imperative to protect forests from use and encroachment by local villagers, only later to reverse its position to the current attempts to devolve formal control and authority for forest management to local villagers. This hand-over of control, so often equated with 'decentralization' and deemed one of the defining features of community forestry, is in the very process of 'handing over control' also establishing a bureaucratic state structure providing the state with a degree of control over its population and resources that it has hitherto never possessed. As will be discussed in detail in the first section of this dissertation, this centralization of control, or 'governmentality' (Foucault 1979; DuBois 1991; Luke 1995, 1999; Darier 1999), is being produced through the regulatory regime

that is being put into practice through the implementation of community forestry.

Similarly, despite the preoccupation with empowerment, democracy, and participation that underscore the program's objectives, it appears that community forestry, rather than reducing inequality at the local level, is providing the means by which local political elites are able to increase and entrench their power and prestige at the local level. And yet, through all of these contradictions, community forestry is lauded as "Nepal's most successful development program."

This research builds upon a multifaceted trajectory of interest by a diversity of variably positioned academics, donor agencies, and other advocates directed at the emergence of community-based resource management (Messerschmidt 1995a; Western & Wright 1994; McCay & Acheson 1990; Brosius, et al 1998). Nepal's Community Forestry Program is but one example of the ever-increasing, transnational proliferation of 'community-based' conservation and management schemes in a wide variety resource sectors: fisheries, wildlife, irrigation, grazing lands, watersheds, and of course, forestry. Not surprisingly, this diverse set of programs has emerged with a variety of intentions and as part of several competing agendas. As Tania Li (1996) has elaborated, much of this interest comes on the heels of many of these advocates' attempts to write, or argue, against several still dominant notions: the tragedy of the commons thesis (Hardin 1968; Feeney et al. 1990; Berkes & Farvar 1989; Bromley 1992); the ignorance of peasants (Korten 1986; Warren et al. 1995); the managerial capacity (Little et al 1987; Gilmour & Fisher 1991), motives and wisdom of government (Kothari & Parajuli 1993; Peet & Watts 1996), and; the superiority of western science and management (Vivian 1992; Hobart 1993). Donor agencies and national governments alike have invested heavily –

financially, institutionally, and politically – to promote community-based resource management as a means of alleviating poverty and improving livelihood security (i.e., as a development program), and as a means to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of forests (i.e., as an environmental program). Similarly, community-based resource management programs have also become closely aligned with social justice and grassroots environmental movements (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Kothari & Parajuli 1993; Peet & Watts 1996). Much of this support is predicated upon and has arisen in response to the proliferation of studies documenting the capacity and adaptability of traditional and/or indigenous resource management systems (Warren et al 1995; Gilmour & Fisher 1991). In much of this literature, it is assumed that local forms of indigenous knowledge and/or community-based resource management regimes are “socially and ecologically the best option” (Agarwal & Narain 1993: 251), an assumption that has yet to be adequately examined.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming advocacy for a community-based approach to resource management, community-based resource management remains an arena in which several contested issues are being played out (Brosius, et al. 1998). Among these is the relationship between environmental conservation, degradation, and sustainable development, on the one hand, and on the other, concerns with social justice, rural poverty, indigenous rights, and the distribution and exercise of authority (Ghai & Vivian 1992; Sachs 1992; Guha 1990; Peet & Watts 1996). In addition to the objective of providing an effective means of promoting conservation and sustainable development, community-based programs are often envisaged as a means to promote a new form of political agency (via local level empowerment), which may or may not bring about a

fundamental shift in the distribution and exercise of authority (Zerner 1994; Lipschutz & Conca 1993). Perhaps one of the most troubling areas of scholarship on community-based programs has surfaced in the last decade as a number of scholars have begun to question the extent to which attempts to administer a variety of environmental schemes is reflective of local concerns and/or does not merely strengthen the established political and economic control of local elite and/or the central government (Peluso 1993, 1995; Hitchcock 1995; Schroeder 1999), or even create a new space for political control (DuBois 1991; Leftwich 1994; Darier 1996, 1999; Luke 1999) or social conflict (Scott 1985; Guha 1990; Ferguson 1990; Rangan 1996; Escobar 1994; Peluso 1992). What these studies have demonstrated is that it has become increasingly necessary to problematize development and environmental discourses as they impinge on national policies and local practices 'on the ground'.

In Nepal, local institutions and organizations are not only being formally recognized, in many cases they are being newly created under the auspices of Community Forestry. As such, community-based resource management (positioned within wider development and environmental discourses) has opened up an opportunity to investigate a new field of 'cultural production.' Community-based forest management, as it is being implemented in Nepal (and elsewhere), involves the creation, formalization and 'strengthening' of local social institutions and practices. It is often assumed that this process of formalization - the attempt to standardize, to regulate, to codify human behavior and local social institutions - is merely a neutral product of, if not also a necessary component for, modernization (Giddens 1984, 1985, 1990; Habermas 1987; Peet & Watts 1996; Scott 1999). However, the implications of this formalization process

- whether associated with community-based resource management or other development programs - have yet to be adequately examined in the context of small-scale, heterogeneous social contexts.

Most recently, a number of scholars have begun to recognize the extent to which social difference has been inadequately problematized with regard to the access and management of resources (Li 1992; Leach and Mearns 1996; Agrawal and Gibson 1999). For example, there has been a strong tendency amongst studies documenting indigenous knowledge and management systems to treat 'communities' as undifferentiated entities (Brokensha et al. 1980; Little et al. 1987; Berkes & Farvar 1989; with regard to Nepal see Fisher 1989; Fisher et al. 1989; Baral & Lamsal 1991; Zurrick 1992).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, although anthropologists have a long history of engagement with local 'villages' and 'communities,' how gender, caste, wealth, and other categories of difference intersect and are tied to access to resources within the creation of community-based resource management programs continues to require greater attention. It is still quite common, for example, to encounter studies of common property arguing that community heterogeneity is a barrier to effective cooperation (Netting 1972, 1974, 1982; McCay & Acheson 1989; Ostrom 1990; Ives & Messerli 1989; Western & Wright 1994). In doing so, such studies thereby neglect intra-community differences in knowledge, distribution and access to resources, involvement in resource management, and 'community' members' resource needs - each of which is subject to change in both the short and long term (Fortmann &

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<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, writing to highlight group heterogeneity was not part of the concern of these writers, who were often engaged in an attempt to privilege the capacities of local villagers, to strategically juxtapose the 'community' with the 'state,' because of the neglect and negative perceptions associated with indigenous knowledge and management systems that only began to change as a result of this, often pioneering, work.

Bruce 1988). The fact that social coordination occurs in the context of dynamic, caste/ethnically heterogeneous social contexts in Nepal challenges not only conventional thinking in a substantial body of research on common property, but also many of our established anthropological understandings of social relations in caste-based, hierarchical societies, of the nature of cooperation and notions of equality and equity, as well as how we as scholars and development practitioners conceptualize and represent the local ‘community’ (Li 1996; Agrawal 1997). That such understanding is lacking is especially troublesome in Nepal where local ‘communities’ are invariably characterized by ethnic and caste heterogeneity, and where access to resources, as well as the power to make and enforce decisions, is highly differentiated along caste, ethnic, gender, and economic lines. This study is thus deeply concerned with the issue of social difference and how it manifests itself at the local level. Given the heterogeneous nature of local ‘communities’ in Nepal, this study asks, in what ways are the effects of formalization distributed evenly across social categories (i.e., caste/ethnicity, gender, wealth, etc.) within the ‘community’? Whose interests are being furthered, and whose are being hindered by the implementation of community forestry?

Rather than long-standing, stable, and/or homogenous ethnic and caste groups, ethnic affiliation and boundaries in Nepal have been flexible, changing to accommodate the social, political and economic interests of their members (Levine 1987; Bista 1991; Gellner 1998). How caste and ethnic group relations are negotiated at the village, regional, and national levels has also been linked to the allocation of resources, in turn raising issues related to the articulation of political, economic, gender (and other social) relations (Gururani 1995; Bista 1991), equity (Messerschmidt 1986), the process through

which formal control is, or is not, devolved to local communities (Gilmour & Fisher 1991), as well as the reproduction of culture (or identity) through space and time (Appadurai 1990, Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Furthermore, local level social organizations and institutions, particularly the ability to organize cooperatively in a multi-ethnic settings (Fisher 1995; Messerschmidt 1987; Fortmann & Bruce 1985, 1988), and the role of gender relations have also been recognized as critical subjects in need of further examination, especially with regard to their respective roles in resource use, tenure, and decision-making (in the community at large, and within the household) (Molnar 1987, 1991; Rocheleau et al 1996; Fortmann & Bruce 1988).

The research questions and general issues addressed in this study are guided by a number of concerns shared by ‘political ecologists,’ a loosely related number of scholars including geographers, anthropologists, historians, ecologists, and others (Moore 1993, 1995; Greenberg & Park 1994; Peet & Watts 1995). The particular concerns shared by this study include: 1) a focus on the resource users and the social relations in which they are entwined; 2) a concern with local differentiation among resource users, particularly those revolving around differences mediated by class, gender, caste, ethnicity, and age, and associated with resource distribution and access; 3) tracing the linkages of these local relations to wider geographical, social and political settings; and 4) a historical analysis to understand the contemporary situation. Perhaps, most importantly for the overall objective of this study is a concern with the search for causal explanations for transformations in resource use, local ecology, and social relations which look not to nature, but rather to social, historical, and political factors influencing relations between resource users and their environments (Moore 1993). The goal of this study is to



understand the effects that the community forestry formalization process has on the practices and people involved in the use and management of local resources. To this end, I examine and challenge many of the premises and accepted ‘truths’ that characterize community forestry, juxtaposing them against the ‘realities’ of local practice and outcomes. In adopting political ecology as a general theoretical framework, the key to understanding these effects requires analyzing not only how and to what extent local social relations and forest use and management practices are affected by formalization, but how and to what extent the effects may be differentially represented within and across important social categories in the village.

This study has also been inspired by several of the concerns arising in the growing body of literature we might consider as the ‘anthropology *of* development,’ itself heavily inspired by poststructuralism and postmodernism (most notably the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour). Most prominent among the anthropologists (and others) challenging development and modernization are Escobar (1985, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995), Ferguson (1990), Sachs (1993), Hobart (1993), Crush (1995), Grillo and Stirrat (1997), and Arce and Long (2000). Perhaps one of the most common threads running through this body of literature is their use of Foucault’s (1990) notion of discourse to encompass development with its ensemble of institutions, body of knowledge, and set of practices. As Gardner and Lewis argue (1996):

Areas of development knowledge or expertise can be deconstructed as historically and politically specific constructions of reality, which are more to do with the exercise of power in particular historical contexts than presenting ‘objective’ realities. The notion of discourse gives us the possibility of singly out ‘development’ as an encompassing social space.

In this study I investigate the particular historical and political contexts around the discourse of community forestry and how this discourse (including its many institutions, knowledge(s), and practices) has produced a new social and political space. But rather than examine the objectives of community forestry, and whether it meets those objectives (i.e., whether or not community forestry is ‘successful’ on its own terms), the focus here is on the instrumental, unintended effects of community forestry as it is diversely imagined, legislated, and put into practice at both the level of the state and that of the local ‘community.’

### **Research Questions**

When I first began my fieldwork, I was acutely sensitive to the power of the state and the international donor community in shaping, or dictating, the content of community forestry in Nepal. Consequently, I sought to examine, in the course of fieldwork in a particular village locale, how community forestry was being put into practice by local villagers, how they remade and redefined community forestry in terms of their own experiences with forest management, and the local social and political context of village life, but also how the formal rules and regulations associated with community forestry were reshaping local villagers’ own social and political experiences. The residents of Manohar did not have a ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ system of forest management prior to, or independent of, the regulatory regime imposed by the state (either during the *panchayat* system or the current era of democracy and community forestry). This is not to say that they did not rely on their local forests for fuelwood, fodder, and other important forest products, just that there was no prior ‘community’ or ‘user group’ in the community forestry sense. However, this had changed since the formation of three user

groups, which are now following the management rules and regulations specified in their respective management plans. Even though I was not able to examine the effects of community forestry on local ('traditional' or 'indigenous') forest management practices, I was able to examine its social and political effects on local village life.

This study is divided into two separate but integrated sections. Together both sections treat community forestry as a means to explore how "village politics contribute to making the state [and how] the categories of state rule are actualized in local politics" (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 5; Tsing 1993). The chapters of the first section explore the interrelationship(s) between development, the emergence of community forestry, and state formation in Nepal. The focus of this section is to explore the emergence and transformation of several of the main themes of development and how these have influenced the direction and practices associated with community-based forest management in Nepal.

The chapters in the second section of this study focus on the social and political consequences that community forestry policy and practice has at the local level. One of the problems to emerge in many of the conventional anthropological accounts of development is the tendency to treat 'communities' as 'acted upon' by development, instead of actively engaged in the direction and outcomes of change. This is the same kind of critique that has been leveled at the formation of the state and its ability to centralize its control that I have discussed above. Anthropologists have also been criticized for their failure to consider "the ways in which development operates as an arena of cultural contestation and identity construction" (Escobar 1995: 15). According to Crush (1995: 22), there are three types of impact typically attributed to development:

development has had a very negative impact; people would have been worse off without it; or some benefit while the majority do not. All of these answers construct the recipients of development – either as victims or beneficiaries – as homogenized, voiceless subjects of outside forces. But those defined in development discourse as the subjects and objects of development are also active agents who variably embrace, support, reconfigure, contest, resist and/or divert development programs, such as community forestry, in a variety of creative, sometimes contradictory, and often compelling ways.

Similarly, dominant conceptualizations of state-building, based as they are on an oppositional model of state-society relations and a coercive notion of power, can at best provide descriptive accounts of the making of modern states. It is not enough to attend to the power of the state alone. As Foucault (1980), Giddens (1985), and others have shown, power has an important dialectical dimension and is simultaneously enabling and disabling (Nugent 1994; Gramsci 1971; Foucault 1980). The tendency to overlook the multiple ways in which people respond is also a problem with much of the literature examining the processes of state formation (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). There are some notable exceptions to this; most prominent among them are Nugent's (1994) study of state formation in Peru and Krishna Sivaramakrisnan's (1994, 1996, 1998, 1999) work on forestry and state-making in India. In order to understand the bases and limits of state-building, consideration must therefore be given to the manner in which expanding (and contracting) state power may or may not be enabling of and/or disabling to the existing and emergent forms of social relations encountered in the process of expansion (Nugent 1994: 356).

Much of the discussion in Section 1 concentrates on the formation of formal structures and discourses. In Section 2 the ethnographic focus shifts to give greater emphasis to agency, to the practices of local people engaged in community forestry. At times, the discussion in the second section challenges some of the premises and conclusions of the first section of this dissertation. This is done not with the intention to claim that the argument in the first section (that community forestry is providing a means with which the Nepal government is able to acquire greater control over its population) is somehow flawed or mistaken, but rather to demonstrate that these processes (and the emergent apparatuses) of control by the state are not all-encompassing, that local villagers are engaged in a variety of ways (and often in contradictory ways) with the state through the community forestry program. Community forestry, I believe, is best thought of as a 'site of cultural production' in which villagers (as 'forest users') are not simply passive recipients of the rules, regulations, and practices that the state (and other actors) 'hand down to them'. Rather, different members of the villager interpret, support, manipulate, embrace and/or resist these 'technologies of control' (Sivaramakrishnan 1999) in multiple ways. In some respects, some villagers in their ready acceptance to form community forest users groups and adopt the practices associated with an emerging regulatory apparatus, including the constellation of modern institutional practices associated with community forestry, become instrumental in furthering the state apparatus. Likewise, some villagers are also provided with other opportunities for political advancement (and greater control of resources, acquiring social capital, prestige, etc.) at the local level. Such opportunities are, however, not open to everyone equally. There are several trends that emerge as the institutionalization of community forestry

proceeds at the local level that suggest that various kinds of inequality may be exacerbated, rather than reduced, because of the program.

In examining the consequences of community forestry at these two levels, this study seeks to answer several specific questions.<sup>3</sup> How has Nepal's policy related to forest resources changed over time, leading up to its current orientation towards political and administrative decentralization, 'people's participation,' and community-based resource management? What effects have bi-lateral funded development projects and environmental INGOs and NGOs played in the formulation of government policies related to community-based forest management? How are local-level management strategies, social institutions, and social relations amongst villagers, and between villagers and the state, affected by the implementation (viz. formalization and institutionalization) of community-based forest management? In what ways has the privileging of institutionalization and formalization associated with community-based programs become entangled with organizational or governmental administrative and regulatory apparatuses?

This study also attempts to understand the "material and discursive" (Brosius et al 1997) effects that community-based forest management has had upon the state, local villagers, and the relations between them. How have certain key or 'diasporic' concepts (Appadurai 1990) such as 'community,' 'participation,' 'democracy,' 'decentralization,' and others migrated into community-based forest management in Nepal? To what extent are local (forest management) practices, social relations and institutions being

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<sup>3</sup> Several of the research questions I pose here were directly inspired by the Ford Foundation funded workshop, "Representing Communities," organized by J. Peter Brosius, Anna L. Tsing, and Charles Zerner (Brosius et al., 1997).

reconfigured as a consequence of involvement by local villagers in community forestry? What are the national and local processes of appropriation, modification, and resistance through which political and economic inequalities are established and reinforced by programs legitimized through the language of participatory and democratic resource management? How do community-based management programs shape a new cultural and political terrain in which social justice and rights are linked to saving trees, on the one hand, and respecting the cultures, rights, and livelihoods of minorities and other marginal populations, on the other? How are these movements, in turn, shaped by the historical, political, and material contexts in which they are situated? In what ways are the rights, forms of authority, and responsibilities of local villagers being proposed through community forestry actualized, and with what consequences?

### **Outline of this Study**

Chapter 2 presents Nepal's political history roughly since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Among the dominant themes that emerge in exploring Nepal's political history are the processes of state formation, of administrative expansion and the centralization of control by the state; the state's role in advancing the interests and bases of economic and political control among national, regional, and local elite; and, a series of flawed and failed attempts to introduce 'decentralized' programs in an effort to foster development.

The history of Nepal's encounter with development is the subject of Chapter 3. The chapter begins with a brief review of the writing on development in Nepal, from early studies of a primarily pragmatic, pro-development nature to more recent critiques that challenge the development endeavor, in and of itself. The remainder of the chapter examines the political nature of much development intervention in Nepal. While there

have been a great many development agencies operating and funding literally hundreds of development schemes over the past five decades, United States development assistance is initially singled out as the leader in shaping the relationship development has had with state formation, bureaucratic expansion, and especially ‘democracy’ in Nepal.

Chapter 4 examines the transformation of forest management policy and practice from ‘pre-formal’ statist concerns with generating revenue to a period marked by forest protection based on state control (supported by environmental concerns), and finally to its present incarnation as a multi-faceted ‘development’ program. The aim of tracing this history is two-fold: to demonstrate the instrumental role that environmental and development imperatives have had in shaping community forestry policy in Nepal; and, to illustrate the extent to which the resource or environmental basis of the program has been surpassed by development and political objectives.

Chapter 5 brings together the discussion of the previous three chapters to examine the unintended consequences of the various practices associated with community forestry. Contrary to government legislation, current development programs and discourse, and community forestry, all of which are premised on ‘democracy’ and ‘participation,’ and claim to foster ‘decentralization,’ I argue that community forestry is providing a basis for extending the centralization of state control.

Chapter 6 sets the context for examining community forestry in practice at the village level. This chapter provides a general description of the setting and residents of Manohar, a relatively remote village in the district of Myagdi in Western Nepal, where I conducted thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork. The main topics include the geographic setting, subsistence and economic context, the multi-ethnic composition of



the residents, and a brief overview of the three community forestry user groups in the village. The focus of this description is to provide a basis for some of the key aspects of social difference that arise around the management of forests in the village.

Chapter 7 extends the focus on social diversity highlighted in Chapter 6 to examine the extent to which access to forests, participation in forest management activities, and membership on forest user group committees differs in terms of caste, gender, wealth, and other important features of social difference. Community forestry policy claims to be the basis for overcoming a number of social imbalances within communities. This chapter demonstrates that there is very little evidence to suggest that community forestry has provided a basis for changing local forms of inequality.

Chapter 8 is the culmination of the study, and examines in detail the ambivalent relationship community forestry has with politics, and in particular the degree to which community forestry has opened up a new political space within which local economic and political elites are able to entrench their power in the face of policies that claim to be promoting equality, participation, and democracy.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Methods**

The methodological cornerstone of this study is participant observation, though in a way that extends its typical conceptualization of research in a specific village or community to include a critical analysis of development and environmental discourses and policies (Cochrane 1971; Fairhead & Leach 1996). In this sense, the boundaries between ‘primary data’ and ‘secondary data’ become less distinct (Ellen 1984; Bernard 1994). The collection of ‘primary data’ at the local (village or community) level was

based upon participant observation and interviews (Ellen 1984; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Bernard 1994). A period of thirteen months was spent residing in the village of Manohar in western Nepal (Figure 1.1), participating in and observing a wide range of daily activities of a general nature, such as agricultural practices, those related to the family, a variety of social events, as well as activities directly related to community forest management, from the collection of forest products to the activities and behavior of villagers during forest user group committee meetings. 'Primary data' was derived from census and household surveys, casual conversations, informal, semi-structured, and structured interviews, as well as questionnaires on specific topics dealing with community forestry. During my stay in the village I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with all members of the community forestry user group committees. Additionally, 60 households (out of a total of 160) from the 'community' were administered questionnaires on community forestry. Although this study is grounded primarily at the 'community' level, this research has been approached in a manner that reflects what Marcus (1995: 95) has recently referred to as "multi-sited ethnography," which involves investigating and probing issues as they cross-cut dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global'. Thus, my examination of Nepal's Community Forestry Program has meant identifying and locating several different 'sites' for the collection of data. The specific issues that this study explores can be conceptualized at three overlapping or interconnected levels: 1) the local ('village' or 'community') level, where data on social relations and forest use and management practices were collected; 2) the national level, where community forestry policies and practices have arisen historically; and 3) the global level, where development, community-based resource management, and

environmental discourses emerging beyond national boundaries have contributed to how community forestry is envisaged and practiced in Nepal. Thus, this study has entailed documenting and analyzing events, actions, behavior, resources and the like, grounded ‘empirically,’ as well as an analysis of discourses produced by government departments, development and environmental agencies and INGOs involved in forest conservation.



Figure 1.1. Location of Manohar (village research site) in Nepal.

With respect to my treatment of development and environmental discourses and policies, I have drawn on a diverse set of ‘texts’ - written, verbal and visual (archival documents, development reports, Department of Forests documents, scholarly writings, radio broadcasts, films, statements, etc.) - of scientists, development practitioners, and policy makers. All of this material, what is conventionally classified as ‘secondary data,’ is considered here to be part of the ‘ethnographic data set.’ As Fairhead and Leach (1996: 20) express it, this approach may be likened to a form of ‘participant observation’ in policy, development, and environmental ‘sites’ of knowledge production. They

demonstrate that in order to gain the fullest understanding of the production of development and environmental discourses (and the effects they produce), and in both the interviews and literature surveys conducted, it is necessary to read and interpret accounts both ‘in’ and ‘out’ of their contexts. In examining development, and especially community forestry, I have had to examine the multiple sources, and multiple perspectives, on a variety of topics, comparing them for their mutual support or inconsistencies, and analyzing them iteratively for clues to the facts and/or representations they produce. For example, numerous ‘texts’ provide sources of information - specific ‘facts’ - on the state of forest use and degradation, of the forms and effectiveness of local management practices, and the like. Simultaneously, these same ‘texts’ also provide information on the particular sources’ perspective(s) on these same topics, which may or may not be self-evident, though may have implications for policy as well as for forest use and management practices and local social relations. While this area of data collection has entailed the review of many community forestry project and Department of Forests documents (reports, proceedings of meetings, etc.), a large number of project and forest staff were interviewed, and also often about many of the reports and studies they themselves have authored and conducted. Additionally, on numerous occasions I was actively involved in meetings and field-based activities with the Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project.

### **Site Selection**

Justifications for the selection of the research site(s) are often an important ingredient of the descriptions of the research methodology employed in ethnographic studies. The situation encountered in this study is no exception in this regard. ‘Siting’ or

‘placing’ my research has not been an especially easy task, particularly when the ‘ethnographic’ subject is not of the conventional kind – a particular ethnic, indigenous, or caste group that has served as the backbone of the ethnographic tradition in Nepal. Nor was the research for this study solely confined to a single ‘village’ or ‘community.’ Nepal’s community forestry program, the central subject of this study, defies such easy ‘placement’. Understanding community forestry requires situating it in places at times seemingly far removed from one another; in meetings and conferences held in Kathmandu or in District Forest Offices, in the field offices of community forestry projects, as well as in ‘local villages’ scattered throughout the rugged and diverse landscape of Nepal.

Perhaps, the easiest ‘site’ or level of investigation to identify with is the local ‘village’ or ‘community,’ the standard for most conventional ethnographic research. However, even this seemingly ‘natural’ locale is too often taken for granted and consequently inadequately addressed. As Appadurai (1999: 231) cautions us,

it is not always clear what the local means, except that it is widely considered an endangered space. My main suggestion is that ‘locality’ is never an inert primitive or a given, which pre-exists whatever arrives from outside itself. Locality - material, social and ideological - has always had to be produced, maintained and nurtured deliberately. Thus even small-scale, customary societies are involved in the ‘production of locality’ against the corrosion of contingencies of every sort. The local is thus not a fact but a project.

Locality - what is considered ‘local,’ or how the ‘community’ is imagined - is an issue that I have had to grapple with through all stages of my research on community forestry, since it forms a crucial component of the program. On the one hand, I have had to methodologically and theoretically problematize the local community as a place/space juxtaposed to the state and supra-state (i.e., transnational actors such as bi-laterally

funded development projects, including those operating in community forestry). On the other hand, my reflections on community forestry as a set of practices lead me to questions about how locality, and in particular ‘community,’ is envisaged and constructed.

### **Disclaimers and Clarifications**

As others before me have been all too aware, conducting research in an area in which a donor funded community forestry project is operating runs the risk of linking findings whether positive or negative, to project activities (Ferguson 1990; Graner 1997; Schroeder 1999) – in my case to the activities of the British funded Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project (NUKCFP) operating in the region where I conducted fieldwork. Some might read this analysis (or ‘critique’) of community forestry as a criticism of the project (or other projects operating in other areas). To do so would be a serious misreading of my intentions and the content of this study. To avoid another area of potential confusion, I feel it necessary to be clear about my position vis-à-vis Nepal’s Community Forestry Program, and community-based programs more generally. I am very much an advocate of such programs, and many of the objectives they seek. I also recognize, however, that in addition to the immense positive opportunities and potentialities such programs afford, they are not without their problems, difficulties, and contradictions. In this ‘critique,’ my concern is not with whether community forestry is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ per se, based solely on the criteria central to community forestry, but what community forestry is doing, what the consequences of the project are beyond its ‘transparent’ objectives. Thus it is my aim that in revealing some of the problems and contradictions encountered in community-based programs this study will contribute to

wider debates that may ultimately improve such programs and our understanding of the social, political, historical and environmental processes involved.

## SECTION 1

### DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY FORESTRY AND THE EXPANSION OF STATE CONTROL

For a half century, Nepal's attempts to promote 'democracy' and 'development,' and conserve its vital natural resources have served as focal points of interest for a panoply of scholars, national and international politicians, non-governmental organizations, and donor and development agencies. At times the connection between democracy, development, and the management of resources has been left unarticulated; at other times, they have been woven together to form explicit strategies for political, economic, environmental and/or social change. Despite five decades of development assistance and political reform (and one of the most progressive – even 'radical' – community-based programs to manage forests) many writers continue to deploy the rhetoric of 'crisis' when speaking of Nepal's political situation (Ahmad 2001; Khadka 1997; Panday 1999; Thapa 1999; Shrestha 2000).<sup>4</sup> The growing disillusionment with the political system, the continued escalation of a Maoist armed revolt against the government (since redefined as 'terrorism'), the tragic events of June, 2001, in which several members of the Royal family were assassinated by Crown Prince Dipendra, and the subsequent replacement of the Prime Minister (the 12<sup>th</sup> in the 11 year history of "multi-party democracy" in Nepal; Table 2.1) have done little to assuage such pessimistic descriptions. Some contend that

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<sup>4</sup> The more recent usage of 'crisis' harkens back to the rhetoric of Eckholm (1975, 1976) and Sterling (1976), writing on an 'environmental crisis' afflicting the Himalayas, and Blaikie et al's (1980) work on development from the perspective of dependency theory



the political crisis is a reflection of the development crisis that continues to plague the country: “The blunt fact is that if South Asia is the poorest region in the world, next only to Sub-Saharan Africa, Nepal is the poorest, economically the least developed country in South Asia, which fact is reflected in its political underdevelopment” (Ahmad 2001). According to the World Bank’s Report on Global Poverty in 2000 (which I hasten to add should not be taken merely at face value), Nepal’s gross national product (GNP) per capita is one-third of Sri Lanka and about 10 percentage points less than that of Bangladesh, the two countries closest to Nepal. The World Bank Report goes on to provide a wide range of quality-of-life indicators, from the provision of drinking water and basic sanitation to infant and maternal mortality rates, and in nearly every respect Nepal does considerably worse than other countries in the region, including Bangladesh even though the latter has a per square kilometer population ratio six times greater than Nepal. The rhetoric of ‘crisis’ illustrated here by Ahmad (2001), and the use of such statistics as those published by the World Bank, the U.N., or any of the many development agencies operating in Nepal, whether justified or misplaced, has nevertheless served to support a multitude of development interventions linking politics to resource management.

The chapters in this section examine in detail the connections between politics, development, and the emergence of community forestry. Primarily historically-based, the next three chapters provide the necessary social, political, and environmental foundation upon which this study of community forestry is based. Chapter 2 presents a slice of Nepal’s political history focusing on the processes of state formation since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The attempts to construct an administrative apparatus, to stabilize the

state's authority, and extract revenue were very much an extension of previous regimes of rule by hereditary rulers who depended heavily on reciprocal relationships with local elites. In many respects, these local elites have long been able to manipulate state policies such that the state's control has been highly fragmentary at best. It is this *de facto* 'decentralization' with which the state has had to contend with for centuries. It is somewhat ironic then that much of the state's current political legislation has revolved around attempts to implement decentralization of control to local levels of government. The interest in decentralization has also been strongly related to Nepal's interest in, and struggles with, introducing democratic systems of government, struggles that date back to the 1950s, long before the 'people's democratic movement' of 1990-91. These issues are discussed in Chapter 2 to draw out the processes and themes related to the monarchy and state's attempts to expand its administrative control, modernize, and more lately democratize.

The history of Nepal's encounter with development is the subject of Chapter 3. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the anthropological engagement with development, concentrating on the recent critiques of development in general, and in Nepal in particular. The discussion then shifts to outline the preoccupation that western development interventions have had with politics, supporting and directing the expansion and form of the administration. The chapter demonstrates that despite the recent popularity with 'democracy' and 'decentralization,' these have been dominant themes for development since the early 1950s. And while an interest in administering 'political stability,' in general, and 'democracy' and 'decentralization' in particular, were focal points for the interventions of the United States, these themes have been at the center of

development approaches and projects adopted by all major western donors supporting a wide variety of development projects in Nepal (not to mention other ‘developing countries’).

Chapter 4 maps out the history of the emergence of Nepal’s Community Forestry Program. Nepal’s forest policy and related practices have undergone a considerable transformation in the last century. The state’s earliest policies, primarily concerned with generating revenue and often supported the conversion of forests for agricultural production, gave way in the 1950s to a period of forest protection based on state control. While these policies were initially premised primarily on the commercial value of forests (as a source of revenue), by the 1970s environmental concerns became the rationale for forest protection. These environmental concerns were gradually displaced during the 1980s as development imperatives, such as meeting villagers’ ‘basic needs,’ improving livelihoods, promoting ‘participation,’ and others increasingly came to redefine the aims, objectives, and practices associated with community-based forest management. This chapter maps the trajectory of community forestry as it has most recently come to be considered “Nepal’s most successful *development* program,” in an effort to explore the implications of its relationship with ‘democracy’ and ‘decentralization.’

Chapter 5 provides the first argument of this study; that the practices associated with community forestry are providing the basis for the expansion, rather than reduction, of state control over resources and the population. The chapter draws on the work of several writers interested in the processes of development and state-formation, chief among them Michel Foucault, James Scott, and James Ferguson, to examine the processes and consequences of modernization and the particular strategies (e.g.,

formalization, regulation, codification, transcription, standardization, etc.) that are being implemented through community-based forest management

## CHAPTER 2

### A HISTORY OF STATE POLITICS: THE STATE IN THE MAKING

*With Walter Benjamin my aim is to release what he noted as the enormous energy of history that lies bonded in the 'once upon a time' of classical historical narrative. The history that showed things 'as they really were,' he pointed out, was the strongest narcotic of our century. And of course it still is.*

Michael Taussig 1987: xiii-xiv

#### The Popularity of Politics

The popularity of politics among Nepalis is unrivaled. During my first eight months of research in the village of Manohar the approaching national election (held in May 1999) was clearly the dominant preoccupation.<sup>5</sup> Politics, I became acutely aware, was a subject of conversations daily. Most mornings it seemed, a large number of men (and even some women) would sit and listen to radio reports of the latest gossip, promises, and activities of the various electoral candidates and major political parties. My usual morning routine involved joining my landlord Kamal and a handful of other men to drink our morning tea and listen to the morning news broadcast of Radio Nepal. The broadcast would usually lead to lively discussions of what was happening within the government, the latest statements by the leading politicians and the merits of the respective national political parties. Campaigning, in its many forms, was taking place everywhere, within district centers and even to the farthest, most remote sections of the

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<sup>5</sup>I began my fieldwork in Manohar in late October, 1998, and ended my stay in the village in December, 1999.

districts. Villagers would break from their work to watch (and sometimes accompany) candidates as they entered the village as part of their campaign tour. And while many of these candidates traveled in grand style atop a horse – a relatively rare sight in most villages, including Manohar – it was the style of the most popular candidate, who eventually won the district election, that caused the greatest stir amongst the villagers: a retired colonial in the Nepal Army, he visited the villages of the district in his own helicopter! Even pre-teenage school children were well versed in the details of the many political parties and politicians at both the local and national levels. On more than one occasion young Narayan Parajuli (the eleven year old nephew of my landlord) lectured me on the virtues of the Nepali Congress party and why, noting the party's symbol (which I found mildly ironic), he felt that everyone should "vote for tree".<sup>6</sup>

I could not help but wonder whether the popularity of politics was due only to the approaching election, or whether it was related more to the recent transition to a multi-party democracy. Villagers would stress upon me that politics has long been a popular subject of conversation, and a source of dispute and conflict within the village. But its popularity has grown, they also say, since the transition to a democratic system of government. As I eventually learned, it was not just 'politics' that was increasingly important, but two new and central features of the current political system; 'democracy' and its counterpart, 'decentralization.'

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<sup>6</sup>Each of the major, national political parties uses a symbol ("assigned" to them by the national Election Commission) to make voting easier for the large section of the population who are illiterate: Nepali Congress Party = tree; Nepal Communist Party (CPN), United Marxist Leninist (UML) = Sun; Nepal Communist Party (CPN), Marxist Leninist (ML) = Star; Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) = Plough; Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP Chand) = Plough and Man; Rastriya Sadhbhawana Party = Palm.

It is not only that politics is a popular subject of conversation. It seems that there is scarcely any subject or domain that is not highly politicized. The importance of ‘democracy’ and ‘decentralization’ was not something I recognized immediately, especially within the context of Nepal’s Community Forestry Program. Indeed, it was not until several months into my fieldwork, as my Nepali language skills improved, that I began to recognize the ubiquity of ‘democracy’ and ‘decentralization’ in the daily broadcasts of Radio Nepal and in the conversations of villagers.



Figure 2.1. Vote for Tree

### **Discovering Democracy and Decentralization**

In May 1990, following several months of strikes and clashes between police and student protesters, the “people’s movement” (*jana andolan*) eventually overthrew the party-less *panchayat* government and succeeded in replacing it with a constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. For many scholars of Nepal, this historical

moment was transformative for its effects on civil society. The last decade, for example, has witnessed the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, the growth in non-governmental organizations and ethnic minority associations, as well as numerous progressive legislative changes in a variety of domains not least of which include expanding women's rights. These are but a few of the more significant opportunities and areas of change that have resulted from the pro-democracy movement. Similarly, much of the literature that has since been written on the multi-party democratic government over the past decade tends to characterize the "people's movement" as ground-breaking and revolutionary (Whelpton 1997) - as if such now fashionable terms as democracy, decentralization, and good governance were somehow novel or exclusive to the past decade. However, to do so fails to appreciate both the historical context of Nepal's political development and the significance and history of development's politicization.

In recent years, development programs (in Nepal and elsewhere) have increasingly taken on a political character. In particular, there has been a convergence between democracy and development (Abrahamsen 2001), whether or not the policies in question are those of the World Bank, or other multi-lateral lending institutions (e.g., the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF)), bilateral donor agencies (e.g., the Department for International Development (DfID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)), or the national government. For example, Nepal's Community Forestry Program, the subject of this study, is no longer viewed as a strictly 'environmental,' or even as a 'development,' program, but has recently undergone a series of revisions framing it as a program that is at once democratic, but which also



serves to promote democracy. I should not have been surprised then, to encounter villagers who, when asked to define “community forestry,” replied, “it is of the people, by the people, for the people.” And yet, I found these responses to be remarkable, not only for what they said about a particular forest management program, but also about the salience of democracy and decentralization in general. Although the history of the Community Forestry Program is the subject of Chapter 3, in which I highlight the increasing political character of the program, it is necessary to point out here that it has not emerged, nor does it now operate, in a political vacuum. This chapter is intended to provide the necessary political context within which the Community Forestry Program operates.

In this chapter I will go beyond simply providing a general political-historical context and instead will draw out two general patterns that run through Nepal’s political history since before the unification of the country by Prithvi Narayan Shah by the late 1760s. The first of these patterns relates to the administrative history of Nepal as it relates to state formation, and specifically the continuous tension between the state’s attempts to centralize its control over its populace and resources and the ability of the local political and economic elites to manipulate the state’s policies. An understanding of these historical processes are significant in that they demonstrate how the contemporary preoccupation with centralized control, and the more recent attempts to legislate decentralization, have their historical antecedents. As we will see, there has been a long-standing and dynamic tension between the state apparatus as it is constructed through policies and legislation – more or less as a *structural* entity – and the practices employed by locals as they engage with the state in various respects. I begin my examination by

considering the process of state formation as entailing an ever increasing escalation in ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 1991; a process similar to the processes of “territorialization” as described by Vandergeest & Peluso 1995). I attempt, however, to move beyond Foucault (1991) and Vandergeest & Peluso (1995) to consider state formation and the increasing centralization of control as a mutually constructive process involving both the ‘state’ and ‘civil society’ (Sivaramakrishnan 1999; Nugent 1994). The texture of centralized control is not simply the result of its coercive power to assert itself on its citizenry, or to expand its bureaucratic reach, but necessarily involves individuals as important agents in the production of the state as they embrace, resist, and refashion the state in various ways at the local level. Some of these processes will be elaborated in greater detail again in Chapter Five and in the chapters of Section Two.

The second pattern relates to the state’s role in affecting local social relations through the very same policies it used to promote its centralization of control. Successive governments from as far back as those first established by the Shahs following unification have been exceedingly instrumental in shaping local social relations, especially in establishing a group of landed elites who became both politically and economically powerful at the local, village level. These same elites performed roles that assisted the expansion of the state, even as their (political) performance in such roles was such that they were able to maintain a great deal of *de facto* control over the implementation of the state’s directives at the local level. The result was that the state’s abilities to centralize its control remained at best only fragmentary, while the interests of the local elites were advanced.

While it might appear that state formation – or the ‘art of government,’ as centralization of control, expansion of the administrative apparatus, and increasing state power - is concentrated mostly in the post-Rana period, that is, since 1950 when Nepal begins to follow a pattern of state formation reminiscent of what took place in Europe and North America since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, certain important patterns were also present around the period following the unification of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, Prithvi Narayan Shah’s conquest of the Kathmandu valley, and his establishment of the capital in Kathmandu in 1770, marks the beginning of the process of state formation, of the emergence of an incipient ‘modern administrative apparatus’ and a series of trends involving attempts to increase centralized control by the state. Nepal has thus had a long history of repeated (and failed) attempts at state centralization, and this chapter sets out to demonstrate that the escalation in centralized control since the 1950s is actually part of a longer trend.

Nepal’s political history is usually separated into a number of discrete periods related to the general character of rule or government in existence at the time. Beginning with a brief overview of the social and political situation prior to the unification of Nepal in the later half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the remainder of the discussion concentrates on the periods of Shah rule between the 1770s and 1846; the period of Rana rule between 1846 and 1950; the return of monarchical rule post-1950; and, the period of ‘multi-party democracy’ since 1990-91.

### **Early State Formation**

For centuries, at least as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the area of what now constitutes Nepal has been a crossroads and a haven for migrants from the Indian plains

to the south and, to a lesser extent, the Tibetan plateau to the north (Regmi 1960, von Fürer-Haimendorf 1964, English 1985). The Muslim invasions of India in the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries, for example, were largely responsible for the migration of a number of “Hindu Indian elites” – notably high-caste Brahmins (Bahuns) and Kshatriyas (Rajputs, or Chhetris) (Rose & Scholz 1980: 14). The obvious result was a frequent transformation in the ethnic, religious, and political character of Nepal that did not begin to stabilize until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Leading up to the end of the fifteenth century the greater part of the hill area to the west and south of ‘Nepal’ (or more precisely, the Kathmandu valley)<sup>7</sup> was ruled by the Mallas who claimed Kshatriya (Rajput) caste status.<sup>8</sup> By the sixteenth century, however, the continued migration and ascendancy of high-caste Hindus into the hill area had a notable influence on the character of political rule by the Malla dynasty. According to Stiller (1975), the consequences were twofold. On the one hand, Rajput ascendancy greatly affected the religious consciousness of the people of the areas where they settled, as the period of Rajput emergence was characterized by progressive sanskritization.<sup>9</sup> At

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<sup>7</sup> The usage of ‘Nepal’ was mostly limited to referring to what is now known as Kathmandu and the surrounding valley. Its use as a term for the entire country is relatively recent, and even today it is not uncommon to hear a villager speak of traveling to “Nepal” instead of using “Kathmandu.”

According to Stiller, “the area where the Rajputs had their greatest impact was in the region of the Chaubisi and the Baisi Rajas” (1975: 63). The Chaubisi and Baisi Rajas were two confederations, consisting of 24 and 22 kingdoms, respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Although the precise origin of the Mallas is uncertain, it is believed that they, like the Licchavis, another of the region’s earliest inhabitants, were Indian by descent and high-caste Hindu by self-identification (Rose & Scholz 1980: 12). The Kshatriya, or Rajputs, are a warrior or soldier caste, considered part of the ‘high’ caste, “holy thread wearers” caste (Hofer).

<sup>9</sup> Sanskritization is the process by which low-caste Hindus and tribal groups aspire to high-caste status through the acquisition of the customs, rituals, ideology and way of life of Hindu culture and religion. Specifically, this process involves observing the basic rules and rituals relating to dietary restrictions, birth, marriage and death, and the acceptance of Brahman priests.

the same time, their ascendancy led to the emergence of two sets of alliances or ‘confederations’ that, despite their diverse populations, eventually contained numerous hill principalities with similar elite structures.<sup>10</sup> The first of these, known as the Chaubisi Kingdom or Confederation, emerged in the area to the west and south of the Nepal valley and contained twenty-four Rajput-ruled principalities. The other, containing twenty-two principalities in the far western region and near the Karnali River, became known as the Baisi Confederation.<sup>11</sup> For Stiller (1975), the distinctiveness of this period derives from the emergence of “a high-caste Hindu elite with a common political tradition and a sense of cultural identity” even though neither the *Baisi* nor *Chaubisi* confederations proved to be an effective alliance system. They both eventually fell prey to the Gorkhas led by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Weakened by familial dissension and widespread social and economic discontent, and the “all-out assault on the valley” led by Prithvi Narayan Shah’s troops, the Malla dynasty and the other numerous principalities located throughout the region were conquered in 1769 (Rose & Scholz 1980: 16). Following the conquest of the Kathmandu valley, and the transfer of the capital from Gorkha, located in central Nepal, to Kathmandu in 1770, the Shah dynasty proceeded to conquer and unify the entire central

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<sup>10</sup> Stiller (1975: 63) describes the Rajputs’ acquisition of control in the principalities where they settled as a three-step process:

1. They were welcomed into a principality because of their talents and rank.
2. They made themselves indispensable in the affairs of the principedom.
3. They deposed the ruler, or disposed of him, and took the reins of government for themselves.

<sup>11</sup> The Malla king who ruled the region in which Manohar is located was part of the Baisi Confederation. His descendents continue to live in Manohar and remain highly influential economically and politically at the local level, as is discussed in greater detail in the chapters of Section Two.

Himalayas from Sikkim in the east to the Karnali region in the west.<sup>12</sup> In the process, Shah and his successors surpassed their predecessors in implementing administrative policies that organized all conquered peoples according to the principles of Hindu law (English 1985: 62). English states that in doing so, “they sought to reinforce their putative claims to high caste status and thereby justify their ownership of all the lands within their domain - traditionally the paramount privilege of all Hindu *rajas*” (chiefs, kings, or princes) (1985: 62). The overall result of Prithvi Narayan Shah’s unification was the establishment of a pattern of rule and a system of political control, which extended to control over resources (land and forests), that would prevail relatively unchanged until the end of Rana rule in 1950 (Regmi 1965).

This early period in the making of the Nepal state, based on the expansion of control by the Shah kingdom over its territory, was accomplished primarily through military and diplomatic means. As Joshi and Rose point out, regardless of the manner in which unification was accomplished, “the previous political divisions - the principalities, or ‘*rajyas*’ - never completely lost their political significance” (1970: 5). Though seldom influential in the new capital in Kathmandu these local *rajyas* remained highly influential, particularly in terms of manipulating the implementation of state policies as they were put into practice at the local level. According to Stiller, in their use of the existing administrative structures of the principalities annexed, the Gorkha rulers avoided any large-scale changes which might unnecessarily disturb the people of the conquered territories or lead to unrest or uprisings, which might in turn strengthen the “already

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<sup>12</sup> At one point, attempts were made to penetrate into Kashmir in the western Himalayas (though this was later taken away by the British) and into Tibet.

existing tendency towards fragmentation” (1975: 256). Even more importantly, a reliance upon existing administrative structures meant that problems associated with gaining control of existing local administrations were solved without burdening the Gorkha’s own administration (Stiller 1975: 259). On the one hand, an advantage of this scheme was that it required administrators to consider local conditions and adapt to them. On the other hand, de-centered control was an unavoidable feature of the early structure of Gorkhali government at a time when strong centralized control was needed to solidify attempts at unification.

The Gorkha administrative structure as it arose was not overly elaborate. Indeed, it was designed to fulfill only two main functions: to collect taxes and extract *corvée* labor (Regmi 1961; English 1985).<sup>13</sup> Atop the central government was the king. As the head of state the King performed several duties: he appointed and dismissed all those in Government service; he declared war, sued for peace and signed treaties; he prepared accounts of income and expenditure, allocated revenues, distributed favors and made grants of land to whomever he pleased (Regmi 1961: 279). As for the general responsibility of running the affairs of the state, the King was assisted by a collateral who served as *chautariya* (Prime Minister), four *kaji* (civil administrators who supervised all civil and military affairs), four *sardar* (military commanders, who only seldom managed civil affairs), two *kharidar* (secretaries in political and external departments), a

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to the heavy burden placed upon peasants by the amount of taxes or rent they were required to pay, they were also obligated to provide an unspecified amount of compulsory unpaid labor. *Jhara* and *Rakam* were the most prevalent forms of compulsory and unpaid labor obligations. *Jhara* was an individual obligation imposed for a non-recurring or irregularly recurring purpose - as in the construction and repair of roads and bridges. *Rakam* was a compulsory labor obligation to be rendered as a specific service on a regular and inheritable basis and imposed on those holding certain land occupancy rights. The latter form of labor obligation was often abused by top government officials for their personal use (Mahat et al. 1986a: 228).

chamberlain, and a treasurer (Stiller 1975: 275; Regmi 1961: 280-1). Within the provincial (or district) administration, the key leadership position was either the *sardar* or the *bada hakim* (governor). These administrators were in supreme control in the newly formed provinces, and were given wide discretionary power. The use of that power, however, was not without restraints.

Although the extent of rule commanded by the Gorkhas was unprecedented, it was not entirely encompassing. Although several of the rajas simply accepted Gorkhali rule in exchange for a certain degree of autonomy, in some cases, they retained almost total control of the administration within their territory (Stiller 1975: 257). Thus, in several respects, the newly emerging state was forced to allow these local ruling elites to retain a relatively large degree of autonomy in controlling internal matters, at least initially. This was due to the relative isolation of many principalities, Nepal's rugged terrain that made travel to and communication with distant regions difficult at best, and the fact that the authority of these local rajas was not easily eroded.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, in such cases, Gorkha's sovereignty and right to interfere in some issues had to be accepted.

Not all principalities were compliant to Gorkha's demands, and the new demands arising from the political structure being constructed by the Gorkhas. Some principalities resisted absorption into the Gorkha polity - either alone or in alliance with neighboring states (Rose and Scholz 1980: 19). For the most part, however, their success was limited

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<sup>14</sup> It has been observed that in some cases, this authority was so strong that it was only abolished as a consequence of the gradual expansion of the central administration, which culminated in the 1960s. Rose and Scholz (1980: 18) attribute this delay in integration as characteristic of the "the patience and care with which the national government expanded its influence and control over regions that had alternate ethnic, religious, or historical forms of identification."



and extremely short-lived. Either the alliances would collapse on their own, or the local ruling families in these states were eliminated or were forced to flee. In such cases, the eventual outcome was Gorkha rule over such principalities through the appointed *bada hakim*. Despite an absence of any effective local autonomy (as had existed for the rajas), *bada hakims* were nevertheless required to accept a working relationship with the local landed-elite families. Once again, this local elite was conceded a broad range of powers over social and economic policies so long as taxes were paid and order maintained. On the whole, however, Gorkha was concerned primarily with the larger issues of policy, the establishment of revenue rates, and the collection of revenue. Otherwise, administratively, local matters were left almost entirely in the *bada hakim*'s hands (Stiller 1975: 264).

Yet despite the initial working relationship between the Gorkhali ruler and the conquered principalities (in which the government in Kathmandu was required to concede to local autonomy), efforts were constantly being made to foster greater centralization and uniformity. In particular, the central government, as it was emerging at the time, cautiously extended its influence on such issues as land tenure, the legal code, and a variety of social customs. As the capital was transferred from Gorkha to Kathmandu, it involved the construction of a new political and administrative system.

### **Land Use Changes**

Although after 1770, the previously important regional caste and ethnic elites came to exercise only a very minor role in court politics, they continued to be critically influential at the district and village levels in ways that assisted the state and furthered their own interests. In order to gain the cooperation and support of these local elites, it

became a common practice for the central leaders to grant trade monopolies and new lands to them. As many village leaders became local functionaries of the state their role was to collect taxes from peasant farmers and control local land use, including the protection and conversion of local forests. Forest cover was directly affected as forested lands were actively converted into land suitable for agriculture. This also had an effect on the distribution and concentration of land in that it initiated a trend in unequal land holdings among a small group of elite (Regmi 1965). Even as these newly (re-)empowered regional caste and ethnic elites were being subsumed within the emerging state structure, they were still able to veto (albeit, indirectly) certain kinds of decisions (e.g., those affecting land-tenure and taxation systems) through their capacity to obstruct and sabotage central-government policies at the implementation stage (Rose and Scholz 1980: 24).

For the state, its land use policies enabled an increase in the tax base at the same time that it provided a means to rule the population by controlling their means of livelihood. However, this also had the effect of furthering the interests and concentration of control at the local level among a select group of elite. Stiller (1975: 17) has characterized the land tenure system prior to Shah unification according to three main principles: 1) the various rulers owned all the land within their area of jurisdiction; 2) land as the principal source of wealth could not be allowed to remain unproductive; and 3) the possession of land was the sole means to wealth and prestige. Although intended to describe the situation leading up to and including Gorkha rule, these principles serve equally well to describe the general attitude towards land well into the twentieth century and reflect the sentiments of villagers in Manohar as well.

As a predominately agricultural society, land and the revenue it generated had always been of utmost importance to local peasants and rulers both, and, indeed, for the newly emerging state. For the peasant, access to land was the source of one's livelihood. So long as peasants paid to the crown a rent or tax - equivalent to one-half of the produce of the land they held - and they continued to cultivate the land, they were given rights to this state-owned (*raikar*) land (Mahat et al. 1986a: 225). As it was upon the value of land and the collection of tax revenue that the earliest, local administrative structure was based, it was in the *raja*'s (and the state's) best interests to have as much land being cultivated as possible.

Other than being a tenant farmer on *raikar* lands, the only other opportunity available was to gain control of a parcel of land as a 'free-hold right' (Stiller 1975: 19). There were three ways in which this could be accomplished; through *jagir* grants, *birta* grants, or through the reclamation of forest or other wasteland. *Jagir* grants referred to land assigned to a person who served the court in some official, civil, or military capacity. Such grants entitled the holder, known as a *jagirdar* (estate owner or office bearer), to farm the specified plot(s) of land free from paying any taxes (Mahat et al. 1986a: 225). If, however, tenants farmed the land, the *jagirdar* could extract the taxes (equivalent to half the crop) for himself. This form of grant remained valid only as long as the official concerned continued to serve the state (Stiller 1975: 20). *Birta* land grants were made by the ruler to a noble for some particular services in lieu of having to pay a salary, also giving to the holder the whole of the produce of the land. *Birta* land grants had no set time limit and were valid until recalled or confiscated (Stiller 1975: 20). The only other way to gain access to agricultural land was through the reclamation of forest or

other land. As an incentive to bring previously forested land under cultivation, a tax exemption was granted, normally for three years (Mahat et al. 1986a: 225).

Land use policy under Shah rule was not unlike the previous attitudes of earlier rajas in that the main objective was to make the land as productive as possible and acquire as large a pool of revenue as could be extracted. Consequently, land use policy was aimed primarily at encouraging the conversion of land from forest to agricultural use in order to increase the tax base - much as it was during the Malla dynasty (Bajracharya 1983b). As English has observed, in the early years of the Gorkha empire, “the *jagir* system promoted land reclamation, initiated the development of a rudimentary economic infrastructure, and financed and supplied a far-flung army while contributing to the stability and organization of Gorkhali rule” (1985: 68). Nevertheless, because *jagir* overlords and other revenue functionaries remained relatively independent of control from Kathmandu, they levied in-kind and corvée labor assessments far in excess of those sanctioned by the State. As well, *jagir* tenants continued to be obligated in providing their overlord with a fixed number of days of agricultural labor.

Also during the period of Gorkhali rule, two particularly notable features were occurring with respect to land use; the government was increasingly becoming alienated from its ownership of, and taxation rights over, the land, while significantly less *raikar* land was available to peasants at the same time that they were experiencing an ever-growing tax burden. As a result of the practice of assigning land to support the military, and the granting of *jagir* and *birta* lands, not to mention the loss of land to *rajyas* (semi-autonomous feudal principalities), the land available to peasants from government-owned *raikar* lands was significantly reduced (Mahat et al. 1986a). Combined with the tax

incentives available for clearing forested land for cultivation, it is believed that such policies led to further deforestation in the hills (Mahat et al. 1986a; Bajracharya 1983b). Not only would this have serious consequences for peasants in search of land for agriculture but would also have a major impact upon forested land, leading to (increased) deforestation. In addition to already existing land grants, new land grants were given increasingly to high castes (mostly Bahuns) and members of the military for services rendered. Of the revenue collecting appointments given to high castes, the majority were on a hereditary basis (English 1985: 66). In cases where the land was already occupied, such grantees were given the surplus above minimum subsistence needs - amounting essentially to another tax burden for peasants (Mahat et al. 1986a: 226).

In contrast to the hill area to the west of Kathmandu, in which the principalities were similar to that of Gorkha, much of the hill area to the east was inhabited by 'tribal' communities (Rais, Limbus, Sherpas) with "diffuse, decentralized political systems" (Holmberg 1989: 13).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the high-caste Hindu ruling families claiming plains origin that were so prevalent in the west were almost totally absent in the east - except in the southern Terai area (Rose & Scholz 1980: 19). According to English (1985), this had an important impact upon the type of relationship the government in Kathmandu had with these groups; that is, this relationship differed significantly from that which the Gorkha rulers had with the *Rajyas* in the west. Adhering to the practice of relying upon existing

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<sup>15</sup> Early observers often refer to Nepal's various communities as 'tribes'. Usage has continued, albeit to a lesser degree in recent decades, but remains problematic. In South Asia, tribal societies in contrast to castes, are typically characterized as geographically localized, egalitarian and stateless, occupationally undifferentiated, and possessing some degree of socio-ritual autonomy and integrity (Holmberg 1989: 14). But as Holmberg argues, "several groups in the Nepal Himalayas, though, do not readily conform to this problematic construction" (1989: 14). Also see Levine (1987).

administrative systems, local tribal and clan leaders were integrated into the administrative hierarchy of the empire as revenue functionaries with hereditary privileges (English 1985: 69). Specifically, they were allowed to follow local customs regarding distribution of land and dispensing of justice, but were required to collect land revenues and assess labor tribute for public works (English 1985: 69). Few Tibeto-Burmans, however, were admitted to higher ranks in the Gorkhali administration - with the exception of the Newars (English 1985: 69). This tendency towards an administration and government dominated by high-castes is still quite prevalent, if only slightly reduced.

Exemplifying the concessions accorded to several hill tribal groups is the agreement reached with the communities in the Limbu area. As part of this agreement, the regional chieftains (*Subbas*) in the Limbu area were granted status as Kathmandu's representatives in their districts. As such they were given a broader range of powers than those given to *rajas*, *bada hakims*, or *sardars*.<sup>16</sup> Particularly important in terms of land tenure, these treaties also guaranteed the *kipat* (communal land ownership) tenure system, which was an integral part of the integrity of Limbu society and culture (Jones 1976a: 64). Under the *kipat* tenure system no 'individual ownership' was involved, rather the land was held as part of the collective and would be allocated to individuals based on membership in the ethnic group. During the past two hundred years, however, the Limbu have witnessed the settlement of Hindus, especially Bahuns, and the subsequent alienation of much of their land as a result of indebtedness to high-caste Hindus. Whereas initially the immigrant Hindus who settled on *kipat* land were politically

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<sup>16</sup> Other ethnic groups, such as the Thakalis and Sherpas in the northern border area and the Tharus in the terai, were similarly allowed broad local autonomy under the general supervision of central government officials (Rose and Fisher 1970: 75).

subordinate to the Limbu, the Limbu now find themselves in a position both politically and economically inferior to high-caste Hindus (Jones 1976a: 66; see Caplan 1970, 1975).

Throughout the period of Gorkha rule, the government faced escalating financial problems despite increases in land under cultivation. In order to combat these problems, the Shahs increased land taxes to 50-70 percent of the rice crop, established a direct relationship between the central government and the village headman for collecting revenue (thus bypassing the district administration), and began to collect rents from *jagir*, *birta*, and *raja* lands (Mahat et al. 1986a). This had a major impact on the peasant farmers, who now not only shared the produce of their land with the government, but also with the village headman and others employed to collect the revenues, all of whom extracted their own shares.

### **The Rana Period: 1846-1950**

The last decade leading up to the end of Gorkha rule was one of bitter struggle between competing factions, a situation that was finally resolved through the violent elimination of several leading officials and the emergence of a new dominant faction that quickly monopolized its control over key government institutions (Rose & Scholz 1980). The principle event that brought about a hiatus in Gorkha rule and the Shah Dynasty's monopoly of power was the Kot Massacre of 1846. The victorious faction was led by Jang Bahadur Kunwar (Rana), who eventually ruled as an absolute dictator until 1877, and thus began the period of Rana rule as hereditary heads of state until 1950.

Jang Bahadur Kunwar, a leading courtier, quickly moved to formally legitimize his rule through the royal *sanad* (order) of 1856, which transferred to the prime minister

all of the absolute powers of the King. This, combined with his acceptance of the honorific title of “Rana,” given to him by King Surendra in 1858, functioned not only as a means of establishing the legal basis for the authority of the Rana Prime Ministers but it also substantially raised the social and caste status of the Ranas. This had the important effect of making them eligible under traditional Hindu caste rules for intermarriage with, among others, the Shah family - a situation that would previously have been found unacceptable. Of even greater significance was the fact that this provided the Ranas with a crucial means of legitimizing and solidifying their position of power.

A major concern of Jang Bahadur Rana, as he called himself after the Kot Massacre, was in establishing systemic stability. This concern with stability was linked to the (limited) degree of centralized control and the need to expand and strengthen the administrative structure. One particular act that helped combat problems of regional governance while consolidating Rana control and ability to promote stability was Jang Bahadur’s establishment of the position of prime minister as a possession of the Rana family. As a means of support, Ranas were placed in a number of high positions throughout the government. This was made possible since the Rana ruler reserved the prerogative to personally confer top administrative appointments, including the post of the district governor. Not surprisingly, these senior administrative posts were almost exclusively restricted to members of the ruling family (Caplan 1975: 33). Consequently, all other senior officials in the district administration, such as those in the land revenue office, were appointed by Ranas who were at the head of the respective central departments in the capital. Although the result was a relatively strong pillar of support throughout much of the country, it has been noted that Jang Bahadur’s rule was



oligarchical rather than dictatorial, since his authority rested with other members of the Rana family (Rose & Scholz 1980). Nevertheless, the Rana system did serve its objective since the main political effect of Rana ascendancy was the exclusion of all other groups from competition for and exercise of power (Rose & Scholz 1980).

In their governance of Nepal, the Ranas continued and expanded the efforts made by previous regimes to centralize the decision-making process and to ‘modernize’ the administration (Rose & Fisher 1970: 65). Hereditary land grants were no longer bestowed (except to Ranas, of course) in order to provide the center with broader controls over land distribution; the army was brought under more effective control, concentrating most units in the Kathmandu valley where they would be under the direct command of the Rana prime minister, and; “rationally based divisions” of functions among offices were introduced into the system (Rose & Scholz 1980: 29). In this latter respect, new rules and procedures (*sawals*) were formulated for each department (Rose & Scholz 1980: 29). (This bears a striking similarity to the pattern of state expansion Europe witnessed only slightly earlier, from the 17<sup>th</sup> through to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Weber 1984; Foucault 1980; Wolf 1982; Scott 1998).)

Efforts were also made to reorganize and modernize the judicial system. Regional courts were established with some degree of independence from the administrative institutions; the objective of which was to standardize court and legal procedures and regulations (Rose & Scholz 1980: 29). An effort was also made to rationalize and standardize the land-tenure and tax systems. As well, a written legal code, the *Muluki Ain*, was introduced in 1854. Based on the shastric (i.e., dharmashastra) principles of orthodox Hinduism the *Muluki Ain* codified the social behavior of the

respective caste groups; that is, it incorporated a few basic Brahmanic principles, mainly those dealing with intercaste relations and caste pollution. While the caste hierarchy of the *Muluki Ain* was a system conceived by, and for the benefit of, the higher castes, the hierarchical order of the castes presented by the *Muluki Ain* was not agreeable to all (Höfer 1979: 40). For the ethnic groups of the remote northern regions the caste hierarchy of the *Muluki Ain* remained a projection “‘from above,’ a social order little known and even less accepted by the local people” (Höfer 1979: 40). The *Muluki Ain*, however, permitted communities and ethnic groups to follow many of their own customs, so long as these local customs did not conflict with the ‘orthodox’ Hindu principles (Rose & Fisher 1970: 89). Although the *Muluki Ain* was periodically revised during the Rana period, it was always in the direction of enhanced Hindu orthodoxy (Joshi & Rose 1966: 12).

Despite the Ranas’ attempts to centralize the administration, and strengthen their control, regional and local elites managed to retain a considerable capacity to manipulate policies and developments along lines that served their vested interests (Caplan 1975: 33). Thus, although on the surface Nepal had become a relatively centralized polity under the Ranas (at least, from the Ranas point of view) effective decentralization remained widespread (Rose & Scholz 1980: 30). Nevertheless, political power, control over resources and other privileges continued to be concentrated only among a small segment of society – the political and economic elite – dispersed throughout society at various levels; local, regional and national.

## **Land Use and the Ranas: Maintaining the *Status Quo***

With regard to land use in general, very little change was made to previous systems. Since land was still the principal source of economic revenue for the government, the goal of Rana rule was also to control and exploit this resource to their own advantage.<sup>17</sup> This they accomplished by utilizing existing land-tenure systems for their benefit (Mahat et al. 1986a: 227). One of the main responsibilities of the district governor was to ensure that the district's revenue potential be fully realized - in addition to maintaining peace in the district (Caplan 1975: 35). Exemplifying the extent of 'control' over land commanded by Ranas, by 1950 as much as one-third of the total cultivated land and forest areas were under *birta* tenure, and of that, 75 percent was assigned to members of the Rana family (Mahat et al. 1986a: 227). In general, these *birta* grants were held *in absentia*; they were cultivated by tenants on a crop-sharing basis, or by means of labor tribute exacted from local populations (English 1985: 73).

It has been said that throughout most of Nepali history, the various governments have been "indifferent to any proper management, conservation, or wise utilization of the forest resource" (Mahat et al. 1986a: 229). Rana policies regarding rural development primarily involved extending the area under cultivation. As such, much of the focus of Rana 'forest management' was for generating tax revenue through the conversion of land from forest to agricultural use for tax revenue, or for the revenue generated from the sale of forest products (Bajracharya 1983b: 232). As an incentive to foster this conversion, the 1854 legal code (Muluki Ain) prescribed tax exemptions on newly reclaimed land,

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<sup>17</sup> Under Shah rule, all tax revenue was considered the personal income of the king, who approved and allocated all expenditures himself. When the Ranas assumed control, the prime minister held the view that this revenue had thus become part of his personal income (Rose and Fisher 1970: 65).

while anyone who worked forest lands received in addition one-tenth of the area reclaimed as personal *birta* (Mahat et al. 1986a: 227). Otherwise, the only other value of the forest (from the view of the central government) was as a source of fuel for the metallurgical industries necessary for the manufacture of arms to support the army (Gilmour & Fisher 1991). Thus, it was during the Rana period that the forest office (*ban goswara*), the forest inspection office (office of *banjanch goswara*), and numerous check posts (*chaukis*) for forest guards were set up for the expressed purpose of arranging the sale of trees and forest products, as well as regulating game in the forest (Mahat et al. 1986a: 232).

Officially, forests came under the charge of administrative heads of the district, specifically the *bada hakim*. Their responsibility, however, was mainly limited to issuing permits for major tree-felling activities. Otherwise, there appears to have been a total absence of structure in the district administration to effectively ‘manage’ or administer the forests. In contrast to the functions of the administration at the district level, at the local level the responsibility for forests remained with *talukdars*, functionaries who were given responsibility for the protection and conservation of forests during Shah rule (Mahat et al. 1986a: 229). Equally important to note, local people were themselves active in devising their own systems of forest management for meeting their needs and maintaining their local forests. Indeed, one might even go so far as to suggest that what ‘management’ there was during the Rana period was left up to local users.

### **The Birth of the Administrative State**

The Ranas eventually lost their official claim to power in 1951 when, after King Tribhuvan wrested power back on the basis of popular demand and general malaise, he

revoked all powers granted by previous Shah kings to the Rana prime ministers. Among the king's initial concerns were the expansion and reorganization of the administrative structure. Following the 1950-51 revolution, it was immediately apparent that "there was minimal government organization at the local level, and no dialogue between villagers and the national government"(Skerry et al. 1991: 36). At the time, district governors were the only tangible link between villagers and the state, and even so they were responsible only for tax collection and police protection.

Perhaps one of the more ambitious attempts made to reform the national administrative system was opening it "to all 'qualified' candidates irrespective of caste, religion, gender, and family connections, and to thereby remove the monopolization by privileged families" (Joshi & Rose 1966: 167). It was hoped that this would reduce the influence wielded most notably by the Ranas who, along with their clients, continued to hold high positions in the bureaucracy and the army. Successfully carrying out these objectives was no simple matter. The social prestige, financial resources, and information networks developed before 1950 continued to give the remaining Rana leaders considerable influence over government activities (Rose & Scholz 1980: 49). That members of the Rana family had intermarried with the Shah family meant that any major changes initiated by Tribhuvan (and later by Mahendra) ultimately disaffected members of his own family. This made several of the proposed changes, including those to the administrative and land tenure systems, difficult to implement.

### **King Mahendra's Changes**

Following the death of King Tribhuvan in 1955, the newly crowned Mahendra attempted to continue to consolidate the central political role of the monarchy. This first

meant controlling various sectors of the government apparatus (e.g., army, police, civil service). By 1960, after nearly a decade of near continuous political discontent that spilled over in the direction of the government in general, King Mahendra began to realize that the party system was not going to work and was not a viable instrument to facilitate development. The king closed down the parliament, jailed most party leaders and banned political party activities despite threats from India against such actions (Joshi & Rose 1966: 444). For the first time since the revolution, Nepal possessed a strong central authority, that of the King. Although the demise of the Ranas may have been heralded as an opportunity to finally establish a “fully democratic” political system, the most significant result of the revolution was simply a shift of power to the monarchy (Mihaly 1965: 22).

### **The *Panchayat*: A Political Institution**

In 1962, King Mahendra introduced an innovative national political system, based on indigenous village councils (*panchayats*), fashioned on the Indian model, that would “build democracy and support development from the grassroots” (Mahat et al. 1986a: 227). In its ‘traditional’ form, the village (*gaun*) *panchayat* was a system of reconciling local disputes. Refashioned, however, the *panchayat* became a new structure of government that was to eventually provide the administrative basis of Mahendra’s rule. That it was easily introduced was largely due to the manner in which it fit well with the vested interests of local political and economic elites (Gurung 2000). Rather than undermine the extant control that local elites had maintained for more than two centuries, the *panchayat* provided yet another political system that facilitated a good deal of latitude

at the local level for *panchayat* politicians to exercise their prerogatives and authority at the same time that it build a new structure of governmental control.

The introduction of the *panchayat* system meant a reorganization of the administrative system into 75 ‘development districts’ grouped into 14 ‘development zones.’ Commissioners were appointed to the fourteen zones and officers to the seventy-five development districts. The district governor was replaced by an Assistant Zonal Commissioner, who became responsible to a Zonal Commissioner (*Anchalades*) (Caplan 1975: 40). Within the district the assistant commissioner (and above him, the zonal commissioner) was responsible primarily for a number of political activities, including the maintenance of law and order, internal security, the land reform program, as well as the overall responsibility for the development of the zone (Caplan 1975: 40).<sup>18</sup> (According to Caplan, “compared to the autocratic governors of the Rana period, the heads of branches in the district today are much more constrained by an encompassing national administration” (1975: 40).) The advent of zones and development districts did not immediately mean the abolition of the old district system, for some time they continued to function in only a slightly different fashion (Rose and Fisher 1970: 77).

The *panchayat* system began as a four-tiered system of assemblies (*sabha*) and executive committees (*panchayat*) (Figure 2.2). It consisted of the Village *panchayat*, the District *panchayat*, the Zonal *panchayat*, together with their respective Assemblies or Sabhas, and the National *panchayat* at the highest level. With the exception of the Village (*gaun*) (or in a few cases, the Town, *Nagar*) *panchayat*, which are directly

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<sup>18</sup> The Zonal Commissioners also functioned as a liaison between local government bodies and the national government. This practice has since been discontinued and the Zonal Commissioner’s position has been dissolved as of May 1990 (Bista 1991: 105).

elected by a Village Assembly (*gaun sabha*) consisting of the adult population in the village, all other *panchayats* or Assemblies in the *Panchayat* hierarchy were indirectly elected. District Assemblies (*jilla sabhas*) were made up of representatives from the Village *panchayats*, one from each village in the district. This Assembly elected from among its members an 11-member District *Panchayat*.<sup>19</sup> All the members of all the District *Panchayats* in a particular zone constituted the Zonal Assembly (*Anchal Sabha*) whose members, together with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, formed the electoral colleges to elect members from various districts of the zone to the National *Panchayat*, which included 125 members in total (Shaha 1978: 66-7).

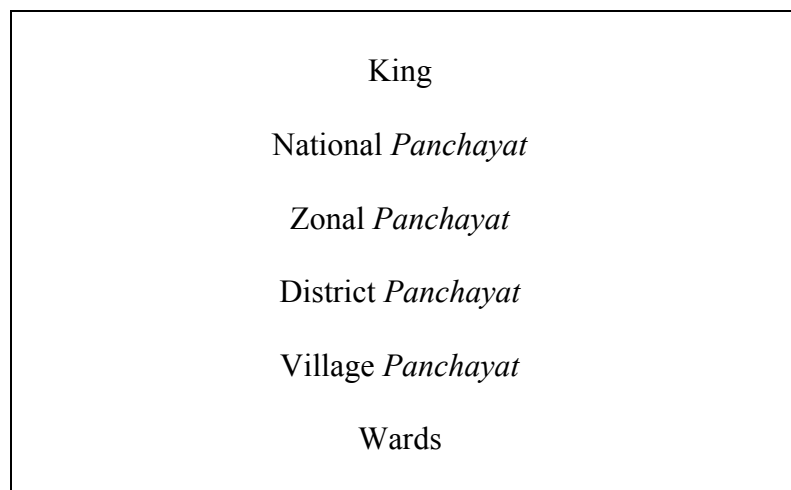


Figure 2.2. The Structure of the *Panchayat* System  
Source: Caplan 1975.

The *panchayat* system was envisaged as a structure based on popular support, with one of its primary objectives political “decentralization” (Panday 1999: 255). Under the state’s new orientation towards serving its citizenry, local people were to be part of

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<sup>19</sup> The 1975 Amendments to the Constitution increased the number of members of the District *Panchayat* to 13 and those of the National *Panchayat* to 135.



the political process. Together with its new role in fostering development, the *panchayat* system was meant to empower local people to articulate their needs. In practice, however, the *panchayat* system had an extremely limited range of political participation (Shaha 1978: 67). Moreover, the *Panchayat* system did not reflect any real decentralization or de-concentration of political and administrative power (Shaha 1978: 74). In terms of the functioning at both the structural level and the level of popular involvement, the actual degree of local participatory power was negligible. The Village, Town, and District *Panchayats* had been given only limited taxation and administrative powers. Their administrative functions included assisting development programs, supervising and managing village-, district-, or municipality-owned or controlled property (including forests), and maintaining certain records and statistics. “The claim that the new *Panchayat* system represents decentralization of political power and functions is completely invalid,” according to Shaha (1978: 74), “inasmuch as the central government’s ultimate authority is maintained intact by granting the *Panchayat* Ministry discretionary power to suspend or dissolve a *Panchayat* and replace it with a provisional *Panchayat* authorized to exercise the same powers.” Similarly, the general population remained excluded from the political process as the majority of the positions within the *panchayat* system “were filled by the political and economic elites who tended to dominate under the old system” (Shaha 1978: 75). That the *panchayat* system was hierarchical in structure and function did little to foster “decentralization.” As Panday remarks, the *panchayat* system “was such that institution building for good governance and development became an impossible proposition since everything was to revolve around the king” (1999: 252) who sat atop the *panchayat* hierarchy.

In an attempt to deal with continued dissatisfaction with the current political and economic state of affairs, and to establish a progressive image for his regime, the King also moved to introduce a number of reforms the previous regime was unable to implement. Land legislation enacted between 1951 and 1960 endeavored to reform the tenure system, rent control, and protection of tenancy rights (Joshi & Fisher 1970: 465-6).<sup>20</sup> By 1964, the major land-reform program was finally launched, and was directed at reducing the power of local political and economic elites who had continued to support and finance illegal party activities even after the royal takeover. *Birta* reforms were introduced to confiscate large Rana landholdings and diminish private Rana controls over rural areas<sup>21</sup>, while *Rajya* reform abolished the special authority and privileges that were granted to a number of hereditary leaders descended from ruling elites. As well, these reforms were also designed to improve the status and independence of the cultivator (Rose & Scholz 1980). The extent to which these objectives were accomplished remains the subject of debate.

The new Legal Code that was introduced in 1963, and upon which these “egalitarian” reforms were based, rejected traditional caste principles and emphasized the equality of rights for all citizens. Specifically, certain sections of the *Muluki Ain* were amended to remove provisions that were in essence non-egalitarian, traditional Hindu

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<sup>20</sup> Policy on these issues was defined in the 1957 Land Act and the 1959 Birta Abolition Act (Joshi & Fisher 1970: 465-6). In an attempt to control (and protect) Nepal’s forests, the government enacted the Forest Nationalization Act in 1957. The Forest Nationalization Act, 1957, and other forest legislation are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>21</sup> Specifically, the reforms included a clause which set ceilings on family landholdings - defined to include parents, minor sons, and unmarried daughters (Joshi & Fisher 1970: 467).

social concepts: discrimination on the basis of caste was forbidden, inter-caste marriages were legalized, polygamy was prohibited, and women were “guaranteed” certain rights with regard to divorce and inheritance previously denied them (Joshi & Fisher 1970: 474). It has been argued that the objective of these “egalitarian” reforms was not only to disperse troublesome concentrations of power but also to appeal ideologically to the young intellectuals, both in and outside the bureaucracy, who would have otherwise supported the democratic legitimacy of political parties (Rose & Scholz 1980). Although the provisions set out in the new code sought “to introduce equality before the law,” this toothless attempt to abolish the caste system did not immediately affect daily life nor did it change the parameters of power and privilege; elites continued to wield political and economic power at all levels throughout society.

### **Nepal Under King Birendra’s Rule**

In 1972 King Birendra Bikram Shah Dev ascended to the throne following the death of his father, King Mahendra. It has been said that unlike his father’s style of negotiation and intrigue, King Birendra emphasized political discipline, efficient administration, and economic development (Rose & Scholz 1980). Birendra immediately began to restructure the decision-making process and bring it within a more formal, and more stable institutional framework. In particular, he attempted to reorganize and ‘modernize’ administrative and political institutions to make them more responsive to development demands (Rose & Scholz 1980: 58-60; Skerry et al. 1991). King Birendra also introduced several reforms to improve administrative performance and reduce the ability of top administrators to alter or sabotage palace policies during implementation. For instance, better record keeping and more objective measures to evaluate a

department's policy activities were instituted; promotions within the administration were to be based on merit and service records, and; greater decision-making authority was to be delegated to field offices and the chief district officers (Rose & Scholz 1980: 59).

As a result of widespread dissatisfaction with the *panchayat* system that had developed over the last decade (among those within the system and the public in general), King Birendra and his advisers unavoidably began a serious reevaluation of the system in 1974. This dissatisfaction, though widespread, emerged from a variety of concerns. Political party sympathizers complained of the unrepresentative character of elected *panchayat* officials. They questioned the democratic legitimacy of the *panchayat* system, and demanded the introduction of direct national elections (Rose & Scholz 1980: 60-61). In contrast, those established *panchayat* elites, who had been recruited primarily from traditional village elites and local notables, and who were able to exact some measure of control with the current indirect method of election, sought a greater devolution of authority for their *panchayat* institutions.<sup>22</sup> Those administrators who were development-oriented criticized the conservative bias of *panchayat* elites, who were largely responsible for the difficulty of implementing the many new development plans and programs that threatened the *status quo*.

Unable to prevent the problem of a dominant party possibly challenging the king's leadership, the constitutional amendments introduced in 1975 were designed to do nothing more than reconfirm the party-less nature of the *panchayat* system (Rose & Scholz 1980: 61). For instance, it was hoped that the Back-to-the-Village National

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<sup>22</sup> See Caplan (1975) for an example of the manner in which control of the political arena is often manipulated by village elites.

Campaign (BVNC) would be able to effectively remove any party sympathizers from *panchayat* elections and recruit new *panchayat* elites loyal to Birendra and supportive of his development programs (Rose & Scholz 1980: 61). These *panchayat* reforms were also designed to strengthen the local *panchayat* while dislodging some established leaders. This included reorganizing and reducing the number of village *panchayats* from 4,000 to 3,000 units, and authorizing local *panchayats* to keep over half of the land taxes they collected. Another aim was to enable them to significantly increase the number of small community development projects they could undertake. These reforms may have done little in the way of overhauling the established political order, but they do represent the increasing shift to an even greater ‘development-oriented’ administration.

### **In the Pursuit of Democracy**

By the late 1970s, the administrative and political reforms introduced by King Birendra had produced a highly centralized policy-making system in which “expert analysis, not political compromise,” was to become the dominant mode of decision-making (Rose & Scholz 1980: 63). Yet, in spite of new policies designed to encourage local political involvement in the national development effort the problem of exclusionary access to state resources had yet to be resolved. This had become an increasingly serious issue of contention, especially as it affected the manner in which politics at all levels was being played out. Combined with Birendra’s numerous political changes and his interest in liberalizing his regime, which had as yet met with limited success, change seemed to be on the horizon. Or was it? Political unrest and sporadic protest movements (instigated by students) in the spring of 1979 eventually led to the king’s announcement in May of that year, that a national referendum would be held. In

1980, as a result of student-led popular unrest for political reform, King Birendra conceded to a referendum to decide whether to continue with the *Panchayat* system (with suitable reforms), or opt for a multi-party parliamentary system. The *Panchayat* system won by a slim margin.<sup>23</sup> The outcome of the referendum was interpreted as an endorsement of the party-less system that would continue to serve “as a means of avoiding institutionalized factionalism and the inter-party hostility” (Bista 1991: 104). A new constitution to facilitate the smooth working of the party-less *Panchayat* system was drafted shortly thereafter.

Following the referendum, considerable uneasiness prevailed, despite efforts by some Nepalis, and by many donor agencies (United Nations Development Program, World Bank, and others), to liberalize the “politics of resource control” (Messerschmidt: personal comm.). Eventually, the Decentralization Act of 1983 was passed in an attempt to devolve authority for local resource management activities to the *gaun* (village) *Panchayat*. This Act also introduced the notion of “user groups” managing local resources (such as forests, irrigation, etc.). Soon thereafter, the First Amendment of the Decentralization Act, 1984, attempted to put power back into the hands of the District and Village politicians. These local political elites managed to command a great deal of power not only within the *panchayat* (i.e., political) system but also in terms of access to resources – many were large landowners or recipients of land grants, such as *birta* holders. This produced a significant decline of trust toward the *panchayat* system as a political system, and towards the *pradhan panch* (village assembly chairman) as local

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<sup>23</sup> In Manohar, in contrast to the situation nationally, several villagers told me of how only the school headmaster voted to replace the *panchayat* system – and was subsequently threatened by a mob outside his home because of it.

level political representatives, who by the mid- to late-1980s had acquired much of the power formerly vested in elites higher in the political system (Messerschmidt: personal comm.).

In many respects, the grip on power that the district and village politicians held, and which was pushed through in the First Amendment of 1984, led to the overthrow of the whole *Panchayat* system. The original Decentralization Act lowered power to manage and control resources to the level of user groups (somewhat autonomous bodies of citizens, with their own elected leaders, management structures, rules, etc.). The *pradhan panchs*, who had become formally excluded from control over resources, pushed through an amendment that would force *all* user groups at the *Gaun Panchayat* level to be chaired by the elected *pradhan panch*. With all the resource management power now in the hands of the local *panchas*, combined with the inherent factionalism found in village and district politics, it was not uncommon for favoritism to occur. As an example, “should a project come along to upgrade irrigation (or forests, or water systems, or pasture management), and there were two groups or locales in the village where it was sought, the *pradhan panch*’s own side would inevitably get it, to the detriment of the other faction or locale” (Messerschmidt: personal comm.). Thus, while the Decentralization Act provided some decentralization from the center (in Kathmandu) down to the districts, the First Amendment put central power into the hands of the local *panchas*, instead of the people where it was originally intended. An example of this will be discussed in a later chapter, in the context of community forestry.

By the late 1980s, the political power and control local elites wielded became further entrenched (which also strengthened their control, directly and indirectly, over

resources). As this began to hinder the democratic process in the eyes of the public, the antagonism being leveled against the *panchayat* system intensified dramatically (Bista 1991: 105). Under the leadership of the Nepali Congress and the United Front of the various factions of the Communist Party, discontent escalated into rebellion against the party-less *panchayat* system. What had at one time been considered a political-administrative structure to bring ‘democracy’ and ‘development’ to the local level through increased dialogue with the state had become a “monocratic *panchayat* system [that] can be characterized as basically authoritarian” (Thapa 1999: 20). And this says nothing of the charges of corruption, nepotism, conservatism, and other complaints so commonly used to describe the functioning of the *panchayat* system. Following another period of civil unrest early in 1990, since referred to as *jana andolan* (“people’s movement”), Birendra agreed to abandon the *panchayat* system, to allow political parties and to have his powers limited by a new constitution. Following the proclamation of the new Constitution in September of 1990, elections were held in May 1991 (Hoftun et al. 1999).

### **Democracy for Development**

Although the period following the replacement of the Rana regime is frequently credited as marking the beginning of ‘democracy’ in Nepal, it was not until after the *jana andolan* (people’s movement) of 1990, the return of a multiparty political system, and a few other legislative and administrative changes, that Nepalis believed their hopes for a new ‘democratic’ political order would be realized. The key to this new era of ‘democracy’ seems to revolve around renewed efforts to instill and legislate ‘decentralization’ for the exercise of ‘local governance,’ as well as to ‘institutionalize’



greater local ‘participation’ and improved ‘planning,’ ‘record-keeping,’ and ‘monitoring’ systems at all levels of government, all in the name of ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability.’

The rapid accent in the popularity and significance of ‘institutional capacity building’ is in large part the product of changing emphases in the direction of development donors (which I discuss in detail in the following chapter), but is also a product of the manner in which ‘institutionalization’ has so easily converged with one of the most dominant themes in Nepali politics over the past 4 decades, ‘decentralization.’ Despite the meager results in legislating ‘decentralization’ from the *panchayat* era onwards, ‘decentralization’ has gained even greater significance and attention. The Local Self-Governance Act (1998) was passed in an effort to relieve the burden of a dysfunctional centralized administration (just as the Decentralization Act, 1983, was intended to give control to local *panchayats*) and to yet again ‘decentralize’ control and responsibilities to local governments, under the new banner of ‘democratic’ governance.

From an administrative standpoint, one of the more significant outcomes following the *jana andolan* was a renaming of political bodies, as if it were a simple matter to purge the problems of the *panchayat* era with new labels. The former village *panchayats* and district *panchayats* were ‘discursively’ replaced with village development committees (*gaun bikas samiti*, VDC) and district development committees (*jilla bikas samiti*, DDC), respectively. Despite this renaming exercise, the administrative structure remained the same, hierarchical, with control still in the hands of the central government. According to Panday, who is one of the more outspoken critics of development in Nepal, the few political changes that have occurred since the *jana*

*andolan* have been pursued solely on behalf of “the mission of democratic development” and not for the sake of earnest political reform (1999: 276). Since the change in the political system to the current constitutional monarchy the administrative structure has remained essentially unchanged, though the primacy of ‘development’ in Nepal, of its relationship to the political-administrative order, has become even more apparent. The role that the international donor and ‘development’ community have played in this process is explored in the next chapter.

It is not surprising, then, to see that in the decade since *jana andolan*, there has been a tremendous growth in the number of publications devoted to the themes of ‘decentralization,’ ‘democracy,’ and ‘good governance.’ The Political Science Association of Nepal, for example, has issued no less than 6 edited volumes in the last five years that focus on these themes: *Democracy and Decentralization* (1996), *Local Self-Government in Nepal* (1998), *Promoting Participatory Democracy in Nepal* (1998), the above mentioned, *Decentralization and Good Governance in Nepal* (1999), *Good Governance as a Basis for Local Democracy in Nepal* (1999), and *Civil Society and Democratization* (2000). A few other notable examples include an edited volume entitled, *Governance in the Doldrums: Who Really Governs Nepal?* (2000), Dahal’s (1996) *The Challenge of Good Governance: Decentralization and Development in Nepal*, and Shrestha’s (1996), *The Concepts of Local Government and Decentralization*. What is perhaps most striking about these publications is the degree to which notions of ‘decentralization,’ ‘democracy,’ ‘good governance,’ and ‘institutional capacity building’ are taken-for-granted and seldom scrutinized. The pattern that so many of the articles found in these volumes follow begins with the provision of definitions, followed by a

survey of the applicable legislation, a list of the problems or constraints, and finally a list of elements or recommendations for how ‘decentralization,’ ‘good governance,’ or any of the other dominant tropes can be achieved. What is most troubling about them is the degree to which the writer’s comments echo the rhetoric and recommendations made as many as forty years previously.

While for many the 1990s have brought hope for a brighter ‘democratic’ future, there remains a legacy of disillusionment with the political system, the behavior of politicians, and the poor performance by the state in fulfilling its promises of bringing about the ‘development’ of Nepal. In the course of my interviews with informants, I’d often ask them about Nepali politics and the government. Often their response would begin with, “haamro sarkar khattam bhayo” (“Our government is finished [ruined, spoiled]”), before proceeding to explain how Nepal is now a ‘democracy,’ but still seems to have changed little, especially in rural areas. As Thapa (1999: 20) laments:

Now, everybody is questioning: Why has democracy in Nepal not been realized in spite of the change in political system and long-standing demands for its establishment? Why has corruption become so rampant and not been rooted out yet in spite of the political reform? Why have the deeds of political leaders and public officials not been transparent? And, how indeed do they continue in their posts despite the stigma of corruption and unaccountability?

This discontent is also reflected in the growth of the Maoist movement, whose guerilla tactics have continued to escalate since the middle of the 1990s. There appears to be little if any sign that the Maoist movement is slowing despite continuous police responses on the one hand, and on the other, meetings, conferences, and negotiations involving national and international politicians and academics.

Even more recently, Nepal has experienced a series of disturbing events that are certain to have a strong bearing on Nepal's political future. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, the Crown Prince, who also took his own life, assassinated the King and Queen, and six other members of the Royal family. There was intense popular unrest in the aftermath, involving riots and hostility towards Prime Minister, G.P. Koirala (who has since resigned), as onlookers pelted his car with stones as he made his way to the funeral ceremonies of the late King and Queen. These events have raised serious concerns about Nepal's political future. As Adhikary and Mathe (2001: 2-3) have remarked, "the chassis that provided stability to the nation has been shattered, certain values (democracy, human rights and nationalism) have taken a severe battering; inter-communal and national harmony has cracked; and the late King, who was considered by many in Nepal as the last hope and a champion of constitutional monarchy, has been cruelly snatched away for ever." Where this leaves Nepal in its pursuit of 'democracy' is uncertain.

Table 2.1: Governments in Nepal Since 1990

	Prime Minister	Political Party	Duration of Term	Dates
1	K.P. Bhattarai	Congress (+ UML interim)	13 months	4/19/90-5/25/91
	<b>First General Election (1991):</b> Congress 110 seats (37.75% votes), UML 69 (28%)			
2	G.P. Koirala	Congress minority	43 months	5/26/91-11/28/94
	<b>Second General Election (1995):</b> Congress 83 seats (33.38%), UML 88 (30.85%)			
3	M.M. Adhikari	UML minority	9 months	11/29/94-9/10/95
4	S.B. Deuba	Congress – NDP – NSP coalition	18 months	9/11/95-3/11/97
5	L.B. Chand	NDP-UML coalition	8 months	3/12/97-10/5/97
6	S.P. Thapa	NDP-Congress-NSP coalition	6 months	10/6/97-3/25/98
7	G.P. Koirala	Congress-NDP-NSP coalition	5 months	3/26/98-8/25/98
8	G.P. Koirala	Congress-ML coalition	4 months	8/26/98-12/22/98
9	G.P. Koirala	Congress-UML-NSP coalition	5 months	12/23/98-5/26/99
	<b>Third General Election (1999):</b> Congress 112 seats (36.14%), UML 70 (30.74%)			
10	K.P. Bhattarai	Congress	10 months	5/27/99-3/19/99
11	G.P. Koirala	Congress	4 months	3/20/99-7/19/2000
12	S.B. Deuba	Congress	ongoing	7/22/2000-

Source: Gellner, Forthcoming

## **Beyond Nepal's Borders**

Nepal has never been an entirely 'closed' or 'isolated' country, shut off from the rest of the world. The earliest and most significant influences have involved India and China. Diplomatic relations with Tibet and British India date back to the late 1700s and early 1800s, while trade networks linking India, Nepal, and Tibet are at least several hundreds of years older (Hoftun et al. 1999; Fisher 1978, 1986). Similarly, Nepalis have for a long time migrated to India, and to a lesser extent China, in search of better economic opportunities. For example, many Nepalis have served in British and Indian Gurkha regiments, since the signing of the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816. As many as 100,000 troops served in Europe and the Middle East after the First World War and following the Second World War this number increased to almost 200,000 troops in India and beyond (Hoftun et al. 1999: 258). But this is only a small fraction of the total number of Nepalis working abroad.

The degree of influence from outside Nepal's borders has certainly accelerated significantly in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was not only the product of a tremendous increase in the number of foreigners who entered Nepal, either working in some capacity or as tourists, but also an increase in Nepalis departing – now not only for employment, but also to get educated elsewhere, including India, Russia, China, the US and Britain. The impact of tourism has increased tremendously in the past couple of decades, but is mostly concentrated in a few highly popular and accessible areas; places like Kathmandu, Pokhara, some national parks in the terai (such as Chitwan and Bardia), and especially such high-profile mountain areas, such as near Mount Everest, in the Langtang area north of Kathmandu, and around the Annapurnas north of Pokhara.

Arguably more important than tourism has been the influx of volunteers from the US Peace Corps (which first entered Nepal in 1962 and is now fast approaching its 200<sup>th</sup> group of cohorts), Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas and the Japanese Overseas Co-Operation Volunteers. Because most of these volunteers are posted for two or more years, typically in relatively remote villages, and are generally fairly fluent in Nepali, their impact is arguably much greater than that of the tourist industry.

Although Nepalis have long been migrating in search of better economic opportunities, this too has increased since the 1950s. It is estimated that by the 1980s, several hundred thousand Nepalis may have been working for all or part of the year in India (Hoftun et al. 1999: 259; Dahal 1998). And more recently, the Middle East, Japan, and elsewhere have become popular amongst men (and some women) willing to travel legally or illegally for employment. Even in Manohar (as I discuss in Chapter 6), out of a total of 160 households, there were 44 males who are working or have worked in India, 27 in other countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere), and a total of 36 who have been or still are in either the Indian or British Army (Table 6.4). Overall, more than two-thirds of the households have had someone leave the village for employment.

The number of Nepalis leaving to pursue educations elsewhere has also risen dramatically. India continues to be the most popular destination, although a number of Nepalis are also seeking higher education in Europe and North America, especially at the graduate level, thanks to the increasing availability of financial support. No longer is this avenue open only to the wealthiest families of Nepal. I encountered countless examples of Nepalis going to the west for their education. Two graduates of the Institute of Forestry whom I had the pleasure to work with (one was a forest ranger in Myagdi

District where I conducted research; the other I hired as a research assistant for several months) both received scholarships to study in Germany. Even the department of anthropology at the University of Georgia has had a Fulbright post-doctoral fellow from Nepal, and three doctoral students enrolled in the past 4 years alone.

The degree to which these factors have influenced the direction of Nepali politics is open to debate. Tourism has certainly been less influential, than say, Nepali students living in India. Indeed, India played an instrumental role in King Tribhuvan's return to power in 1951, while Indian political parties in the aftermath of Indian independence inspired Nepali counterparts.<sup>24</sup> The conflicts between India and China since the 1960s, with Nepal as a buffer state between them, has also been important, not least of which for drawing financial aid, grants and loans from Western donors. The strategic value of Nepal, wedged between communist China and India, the "largest new 'democracy' in the world," was not overlooked by the West. Between 1951 and 1995 Nepal had received in excess of US\$3.7 billion in grants or concessionary loans, which gave it a higher per capita rate than for any other South Asian state (Hoftun et al. 1999: 258). The Indian trade embargo in 1989 added fuel to the discontent behind the *jana andolan* in 1990, while Indian support afterwards went a long way in ensuring the eventual success of the movement. But these are only some of the many external influences that have undoubtedly influenced Nepal's preoccupation with 'democracy'. The role that development has played in this respect is discussed in Chapter 3.

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<sup>24</sup> For an exceptionally detailed history of politics in Nepal, see Hoftun, Raeper, and Whelpton's (1999) *People, Politics and Ideology: Democracy and Social Change in Nepal*.

## Summary

The preoccupation with consolidating social and political control has long been a feature of the government in Nepal, since at least the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification of the country in the late 1760s. Attempts to centralize control by Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors produced several changes over the feudal structure that predominated previously. In particular, the leading families of the court in Gorkha were removed from power and replaced by high-caste Hindu families from other principalities. When the Ranas seized power in 1846, their efforts were dedicated to strengthening their control at all levels of the government, which they accomplished through the strategy of placing Ranas in a number of high positions. And in an effort to expand upon earlier attempts at introducing Hindu caste principles, the Ranas instituted the *Muluki Ain* in 1854, a move that further legitimized and strengthened their position (and that of all high-caste Hindus) in society – socially, politically and economically. Even in the post 1950 period, when continual pronouncements indicated the government's plans to introduce changes in the administrative system and eliminate the concentrations of power and wealth in society, the established elites managed to remain politically and socially the most powerful members of society. As a case in point, when the *panchayat* system was introduced, the majority of the political and economic elites from the previous regime came to dominate the new system, as has also occurred during the shift from the *panchayat* system to the current multi-party, 'democratic' system.

Despite attempts to achieve greater centralization, an unavoidable feature of the government as it evolved over the past two hundred years has been the degree of influence and control regional and local elites have acquired at the district and local



levels. Throughout the Shah and Rana periods, while regional caste and ethnic elites came to exercise less of a role in court politics, they continued to be critically influential at the district and local levels. In effect, they variously adopted and manipulated policies and programs that served their own interests. Another way of reading the achievements of centralization is to see them not merely as the product of the state's capacity to impose changes (in a coercive manner), but as stemming from the degree to which they were accepted and adopted at the local level.

The effect of the *panchayat* system was much the same. On the one hand, the *panchayat* system was organized in such a way that the king and the members of the National *Panchayat* (many of whom the king appointed personally) remained at the center of control. Yet on the other hand, the aim of the *panchayat* system was decentralization, which meant that it essentially legislated the *de facto* political situation at the local level where elites maintained their concentrations of power and control. In practice, however, this decentralization was stopped short of being extended to its fullest extent: it was intended to seek greater involvement of the general public in the political (and development) process. Instead, village (and district) politicians often continued to manipulate policies that served their own interests and in many cases acquired greater power than they held previously. Thus, when the *panchayat* system was introduced, administrative personnel were given the responsibility to administer development related services to the public, but in the process produced a system of centralized control at the local level that tended to mirror the apparatus of hierarchical control being produced at the level of the state.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a historical background for the main themes of this section, and also to draw out what has become a pattern of contradiction. Attempts to centralize control – arguably the premiere objective of government – have been repeatedly thwarted by the ability of local elites to effectively maintain a large degree of decentralized control. The irony is that the state's attempts now to legislate decentralization and stimulate it through Nepal's Community Forestry Program is producing, with unprecedented success, both a set of procedures and an apparatus of centralized control.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE 'DEVELOPMENT' OF NEPAL: THE STATE IN THE MAKING II/TOO

*'Development' .... Wars are fought and coups are launched in its name. Entire systems of government and philosophy are evaluated according to their ability to promote it. Indeed, it seems increasingly difficult to find any way to talk about large parts of the world except in these terms.*

James Ferguson 1990: xiii

#### **The Ubiquity of Development**

'Development' (*bikas*) is impossible to escape in Nepal. 'Development' is variously a goal, a process, an idea, a myth, an illusion, a subject and object, and it has come to permeate Nepali society to an incredible extent. Pick up any of Nepal's daily newspapers, whether written in English or Nepali, and 'development' saturates its pages. It pervades conversations among politicians in Kathmandu and villagers in even the remotest of teashops. It is the subject of conferences, workshops, and meetings held by international donors, national NGOs, and local communities. It is the basis of an increasingly important social category used to map places on a conceptual grid (Pigg 1992). 'Development' is even a standard used to judge the value of research (whether academic or other) conducted in Nepal. As has been argued elsewhere (Harper and Tarnowski 2000), it seems that there is scarcely any activity that is designed or put into action, either by the state, the multitude of international agencies and NGOs operating in Nepal, or even by local villagers, that is not cast in terms of 'development.'

‘Development’ is arguably one of the most significant and imposing organizing concepts in Nepal.

Nepal is not only the site of a continuous cacophony of ‘development’ discourse(s), nor is it simply in a state of continuous ‘development,’ it is a ‘development state’ always in the making. Since Nepal opened its borders to (western) foreigners, and to the riches of foreign aid in the early 1950s, ‘development’ has increasingly come to dominate nearly every sphere and sector of Nepali society. At the same time, ‘development’ has woven itself together with many of the other main themes of the international order of the past 5 decades, chief among them poverty, hunger, and environmental crisis. Development has come to “rechart Nepalese history” (Guthman 1997: 49), not to mention it’s “modern political identity” (Pigg 1992: 498). It should not be a surprise that the popularity of ‘development’ as a topic of conversation is equaled only by ‘politics.’ Indeed, it is the basis upon which political units have become understood; the defunct *panchayat* replaced by village *development* committees (VDC) and district *development* committees (DDC). The similarities to Lesotho described by Ferguson (1990) are remarkable. Referring to the name VDC, one of Ferguson’s informants remarked, “You see.... I think that the name is not right; it is nicknamed this name of ‘development,’ but you can see that it is a political body” (1990: 110). In the context of Nepal, this statement would seem to be inverted; while the VDC claims to serve as a political unit, it is the notion of ‘development’ that most stands out. Yet, politics and development, as we will come to see, converge in multiple ways, not least among them the notions woven together in the naming of administrative units, the VDCs and DDCs. Most important, for the subject of this chapter, is the manner in which

‘development’ has been instrumental in shaping, even constructing, the modern state in Nepal.

One of the most notable features about the vast majority of the literature on development in Nepal, other than its sheer volume, or the attention devoted to its failure (often in the form of a shopping list of reasons), is the conventionality with which the ‘history of development’ has been described and categorized; that is, in terms of ‘economic’ periods. This is perplexing for no other reason than the simple fact that notwithstanding the tremendous amount of ‘assistance’ that was offered was financial, very little of this mass of funding was directed at programs and projects that were directly of an economic nature. What this literature tends to neglect is the political nature of development. Eugene Mihaly (1965) argues, in his often overlooked and under-appreciated study, *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal*, that economic assistance in Nepal, particularly by the US, was premised on the belief that “economic stability provided political stability,” and that political stability was much needed in a country where people were experiencing a “revolution of rising expectations” (Mihaly 1965: 2). This chapter attempts to extend Mihaly’s study into the present where ‘democracy,’ ‘decentralization,’ and ‘good governance’ now serve as central concerns for development, and community-based forest management, in Nepal.

### **Questioning Development**

*Development occupies the center of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation... at the same time, very few words are as feeble, as fragile and as incapable of giving substance and meaning to thought and behavior.*

Gustavo Esteva 1992: 8

This chapter does not begin (nor end) with a personal attempt to define ‘development,’ nor does it conclude with recommendations about how development could be made better. As Jonathon Crush comments, “as an arena of study and practice, one of the basic impulses of those who write development is a desire to define, categorize and bring order to a heterogeneous and constantly multiplying field of meaning” (1995: 2). But in Nepal’s case, if not also elsewhere, trying to produce such order is unlikely. Rather, in this account of ‘development’ in Nepal, my aim is to map out a history of development (one of perhaps many possible such histories) as it applies to community forestry, drawing attention to the preoccupation development has had with politics. “Inquiry into the role of development in Nepal,” Stacy Leigh Pigg petitions, “should not be limited to asking the questions development institutions themselves ask” (1992: 45). What is needed is “a holistic, historically grounded social analysis of development” (Pigg 1992: 45). Nevertheless, let me add that I consider ‘development’ to be an exceedingly broad domain encompassing a diverse set of ‘contradictory’ processes, policies, plans, programs, projects and practices that have been just as equally directed at politics as they have at alleviating poverty, improving livelihoods, or fostering the sustainable management of the environment.

I will trace the history of the proliferation of ‘development’ in Nepal, from its earliest rather vague incarnation as “foreign aid” in the 1950s through to the late 1990s where ‘development’ has become increasingly difficult to define with its continuously shifting, expanding, and contested meanings. My purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive meta-narrative of all strains of ‘development’ in Nepal. Rather, throughout this historical overview, I devote my attention to a particular motif that

circulates within ‘development,’ that is, the role ‘development’ has had in shaping the architecture of the state – building the administration - as well as introducing a number of institutional practices of a political nature as part of its development agenda.

The political character of development has by no means been the primary intention of donor agencies, projects or programs. It would be unfair to characterize development as solely motivated by political aims; humanitarian motivations, for example, have always been important. It is perhaps best to consider development’s relationship with politics as ambivalent – at times effacing and at others openly and directly engaged with politics and the machinery of the state. Yet, despite this ambivalence, the many transformations and permutations ‘development’ has undergone in Nepal (and despite the proliferation of projects in nearly every imaginable sector of Nepali society), politics, the role and shape of the government, and democracy have had a strong presence in development interventions. In recognizing the immense preoccupation that Nepal has with development and the role development has played in supporting the state, I envisage Nepal as a ‘development state.’ By this I mean that the ‘development’ apparatus or ‘discourse’ – as a constellation of ideas, theories, institutions and practices (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Foucault 1990) – has become central to government policies, legislation, and practice, just as good governance, democracy, and decentralization have become central to ‘development.’ I argue that the formation of the state in Nepal has gone hand-in-hand with ‘development’.

In her examination of the production of the discourse of an environmental crisis and its connection to certain development interventions, Guthman (1997) provides a framework for categorizing the post-Rana history of development in terms of a

“succession of three aid regimes.” She uses the term ‘aid regime’ to refer “to a historically particular constellation of donors, sectoral emphases, aggregate assistance and composition of assistance (that is, proportion of grants to loans). Each aid regime was mutually reinforced by a set of dominant ideas regarding the goals and strategies of ‘development,’ labeled by the terms Modernization, Basic Needs, and Neo-liberalism” (Guthman 1997: 47). Although Guthman problematizes her use of the term ‘regime,’ as “admittedly reifying,” and used only as an analytical device and not to “presuppose the degree of intentional cohesion of institutions, principles, and practices that the term ‘regime’ may imply,” I wish to distance my examination of the proliferation of development from such categorizations. Certainly, a number of trends do emerge, but I feel that the underlying notions of rupture, displacement, and replacement that tend to be so common in such categorizations obscure what I consider to be a more fundamental issue with development discourse(s): its ability to transmute, to incorporate or ‘appropriate’ different approaches, and even challenges.

It is not enough to study development from the tunnel vision of a single project or program, without situating it within the wider field of power relations that operate transnationally. Drawing on Escobar’s work (1988), Stacy Pigg (1992: 492) emphasizes how although development projects are carried out in specific localities, the development vision is simultaneously international and universalizing, such that development policies have “a double orientation” toward both the problems of the so-called underdeveloped country and the international ideals and standards of development. This kind of “double orientation” is particularly apparent in Nepal’s long-term relationship with USAID, one of the earliest and arguably most influential donors, espousing the rhetoric of designing



programs tailored to Nepal's development needs, but which more directly reflect the donor's foreign policy agenda, an agenda oriented towards fostering democratic governments (Abrahamsen 2001). As Crush (1995) has remarked, at issue is the nature of the 'language of international development,' wherein a focus on the 'economic' or 'technocratic' produces a peculiarly 'depoliticized' (Ferguson 1990) notion of development. This is all the more problematic in that it effaces the long-standing recognition of the relationship between "economic stability" and "political stability," and simultaneously denies the immense role that donor agencies have played in promoting particular political outcomes (Abrahamsen 2001). The history of American assistance in Nepal, it will become increasingly clear, is a history of repeated attempts at nation-building to produce its mirror image.

Although the 'history of development' portrayed in this chapter begins by singling out the role played by the United States in Nepal, this is not meant to be interpreted as a criticism of US involvement. The purpose here is not to judge it as 'good' or 'bad,' effective or ineffective, with respect to its own objectives, but rather to problematize US involvement, revealing that several of the dominant themes of development, which have come to inform the development agendas of most western donors, are not isolated nor of recent design. The preoccupation that development has had with 'state-making,' where 'institutional capacity building,' 'democratic institutions,' 'good governance' are the now dominant tropes, have also come to dominate the conceptualization and practice of community forestry.

## **From Early Anthropological Encounters to Critical Engagements**

Anthropology has had a long history of involvement in development programs and modernization schemes. Indeed, anthropology's encounter with 'development' in the post-war era is, in many respects, an extension of earlier activities by applied anthropologists that date back as far as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (van Willigan 1993; Mair 1984; Potter 1993; Gardner & Lewis 1996). Anthropologists' engagement with 'development' has entailed a variety of capacities and roles; as extension agents, advocates, intermediaries, and evaluating and appraising projects, to list only some of their roles. Anthropologists involved in development have also been critical of failed development schemes, and in many respects are among the earliest critics of development.

For many anthropologists the primary source of the failure experienced by so many development programs has been the excessive attention devoted to economic considerations detached from the wider cultural context. For many applied anthropologists the problem has been to find ways to incorporate 'cultural' considerations – traditions, values, and beliefs – in development plans. These challenges to development, however, were primarily concerned with how development was being conducted and designed, trying to mitigate the failures or ills associated with particular approaches to development. This has produced a continuous series of attempts to redesign 'development,' to find ever newer, better, and alternative 'development' approaches. Many of those engaged in the search for these alternatives argue that the problem lies in development design and/or practice. For the most part, anthropologists

have remained advocates for development, attempting to assist in improving the

‘development’ endeavor. As Gardner and Lewis (1996: 63) remark,

this body of work is thus the most easy to apply practically, and texts often end with concrete recommendations.... Anthropologists tend to call for the same solutions: local participation, awareness of social and cultural complexities, and the use of ethnographic knowledge at the planning stage.

The many solutions that have been promoted have stimulated a diverse number of

‘development alternatives’: ‘community development,’ the ‘basic needs approach,’

‘sustainable development,’ from top down to ‘participatory development,’ ‘farmer first,’

‘sustainable livelihoods,’ ‘women in development,’ ‘poverty elimination,’ ... the list is

nearly endless and continues unabated.

Criticism of ‘development’ is obviously not a new phenomenon. However, not all critiques of ‘development’ have sought to provide recommendations or alternative approaches. Dependency theorists who have long criticized the unequalizing process inherent in ‘development.’ Chief among them are the works of Andre Gunder Frank (1969) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974). Amartya Sen’s (1981) highly influential *Poverty and Famines*, also fits within this category exploring the problems of ‘entitlement’ and the structural inequalities of access that are part of the capitalist world order. However, much of the criticism of ‘development,’ and the many studies of its failure, tend to challenge development but rarely question its foundation.

More recently, writers have begun to problematize ‘development’ in an entirely different manner. Treating ‘development’ as a ‘discourse,’ this body of work questions the premises at the very foundation of the ‘development’ endeavor (Sachs 1992; Crush 1995; Hobart 1993). It is in this treatment of ‘development’ as a field of academic

enquiry that the shift from ‘development anthropology’ to an ‘anthropology of development’ is most apparent (Long & Long 1992; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Arce & Long 2000). In particular, the “post-modern challenge” to ‘development’ is most evident in the works of Ferguson (1990), Sachs (1992), Escobar (1995), Crush (1995), Hobart (1993) and others, as they expose ‘development’ to a new field of debate.<sup>25</sup> Arturo Escobar (1984; 1995), as well as the contributors to the edited volumes by Jonathon Crush (1995), and Wolfgang Sachs (1992), adopts this approach to reflect on the “discourse” of development. Escobar (1995) charts the genealogy of ‘development’ from inception, post Second World War, to the present, focusing on Columbian experiences with the development apparatus. He questions development as an organizing principle, how states become charted across a terrain of “undeveloped” or “developed,” how this shapes the identity of those labeled Third World citizens, and how states become organized around new relations of economic, social and political inequality. But what distinguishes these writers from so many other critiques of development is that they are not concerned with the re-perpetuation of development, or a desire to “make development better,” but rather they are searching for, and attempting to articulate alternatives *to* development (Parajuli 1991, Escobar 1995; Peet and Watts 1995). In some cases, even doing away with ‘development’ entirely.<sup>26</sup> To what extent this is possible remains open to debate.

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<sup>25</sup> A large part of this “post-modern challenge” to ‘development’ has drawn on recent theoretical debates within anthropology more generally, and influenced most notably by Clifford and Marcus (1986), Marcus and Fisher (1986), Said (1978).

<sup>26</sup> In doing away with ‘development,’ these authors are not suggesting that alleviating poverty, improving standards of health and education, increasing agricultural production or forest areas, etc. are not

## Writing Development in(to) Nepal

The literature on development in Nepal parallels quite closely, not surprisingly, those encountered more generally in the body of literature on ‘development.’ Like their counterparts elsewhere anthropologists (and other social scientists) writing on Nepal have been engaged with the practice of ‘development’ in a variety of capacities. Some of the earliest examples include the work done by John Cool while in the employ of USAID/USOM. Gabriel Campbell and Donald Messerschmidt were amongst the earliest anthropologists hired by USAID in the early 1980s, while several others have been employed in a variety of capacities in projects as ‘applied anthropologists.’ Much of the work in an ‘applied’ capacity in Nepal was the result of research conducted on a variety of economic, health, and ecological issues. These studies have ranged from specific issues such as resource depletion and population problems (Macfarlane 1976; Fricke 1986), trade (Messerschmidt and Gurung 1973; Fisher 1978, 1986; Fürer-Haimendorf 1975, 1978;), economic organization (McDougal 1968; Messerschmidt 1981), subsistence strategies (Schroeder 1985), to more general ecological issues (Messerschmidt 1976, 1977, 1987, 1989, 1990; Molnar 1981, 1987, 1991; Bennett 1974), and health (Justice 1986). Many studies (particularly those which focused on environmental issues) also emerged as a response to the growing distress that had arisen out of the perception of an impending environmental ‘crisis’ in Nepal and the Himalayan region as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

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worthy objectives, but are rather suggesting other ways of achieving these goals outside of the development apparatus.

<sup>27</sup> Concern regarding an environmental ‘crisis’ in the Himalayas was prompted by articles written by Eckholm (1975, 1976) and Sterling (1976). Although this concern originated in the west, and was

One of the earliest studies to actually examine some of the problems associated with development in Nepal was that of Judith Justice (1986) who examined health projects in Nepal. Justice's work is an example of an anthropologist whose well-received analysis sought to improve health service delivery by seeking to make the development process more sensitive to the local cultural context. As Justice argued, the problem was that 'development' projects, in this case in the health sector, were poorly designed. Development projects, therefore, needed to be more sensitive to the local cultural context. In asking "What is this *bikas*?" Des Chene (1996) writes,

The answers are many, but all of a kind: development, social betterment, increase in well-being and productivity, modernization, opportunity... *Bikas*, in sum, is good, and there ought to be more of it in more places. Defined in these general, positive terms, or somewhat more specifically as the means to better health, environmental and employment conditions, educational opportunity and so on, few if any would disagree.

From the perspective that Justice (1986), Des Chene (1996) and so many others share, the problem is not with development per se, but was rather due to poor planning and design, as if development were only broken and needs to be fixed.

In the past decade, there has emerged a growing body of literature dedicated to exploring, with a variety of sophistication, other reasons why it is that 'development' projects have so often failed in Nepal. Dor Bahadur Bista's (1991) controversial, yet classic critique of development, *Fatalism and Development*, was, like the work of Justice, highly popular particularly with ex-patriots working in development. Bista's approach,

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passionately pursued by western scholars, its impact in the Himalayas has had a rippling effect. Most notably for its effects on Nepal, the perception of a "crisis" of the magnitude put forth by Eckholm and Sterling resulted in an expansion of research and development in the country. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 4.

however, took the opposite approach to the question of ‘development’s’ failures, conceptualizing the problem as the result of “Brahmanic culture,” various forms of ‘corruption,’ and a dysfunctional bureaucracy. Bista’s book (and a much freer press following the democratic movement) stimulated a growing body of literature devoted to Nepal’s development woes. In much of this literature, blame for the failure to develop tends to be directed at all the usual suspects: Hinduized bureaucracy, caste, stubborn adherence to tradition, pre-modern feudalism, “source and force,” “chakari” (Harper and Tarnowski 2000). Consider the following:

Nepal is a classic example of a traditional society with most of the predominantly rural populace illiterate; conditioned to stern authority exercised by the socioeconomic elite; exercising little control over their own destiny and existing at near subsistence level. To this rather bleak situation must be added other complexities such as the variety of ethno-linguistic groupings, poor communications, isolation, lack of transportation facilities and relatively weak and unsophisticated systems of administration... modernization then is dependent upon rapid and dramatic changes in the institutions, values and attitudes. (Skerry et al. 1991:101)

This passage, from a USAID Capital Assistance Program Document published in 1965, is still representative of the typical rationalizations of development’s failures in Nepal. Either ‘development’ is not properly designed to account for “culture,” as in Justice’s account, or “culture” is an impediment to development implementation, as in Bista’s (1991) account. ‘Development,’ however, was itself left unquestioned.

In the years since the publication of *Fatalism and Development*, a small but growing number of writers on Nepal, both Nepali and ex-pat, have begun to question the previously “unassailable pillar of ‘development’” (Harper and Tarnowski 2000). For example, the second issue of *Studies in Nepali History and Society* (December, 1996)

was devoted to '*bikas*,' while other issues of the journal also contain articles on the subject (Paudel 1997), including a literature review by Prasain (1998) of recent '*bikas*' publications. Some of the more notable challenges to development include Tatsuro Fugikura's (1996) study questioning USAID's treatment of Nepal as a "development laboratory," and Kamal Adhikary's (1996) questioning of the unification of Nepal through '*bikas*' as the means to further both the symbols and values of the dominant group (i.e., Hindus, and especially high castes) at the expense of ethnic minorities and low castes. Kanak Mani Dixit (1997), one of the most vocal critics of development in Nepal, suggests it is time for Nepal, and Nepalis, to take control of its own destiny, banishing development and foreign donors, and turning its efforts to invest solely in education.

Nanda Shrestha's *In the Name of Development* (1998) is perhaps the most scathing of the few criticisms of development to have recently surfaced in Nepal. In this highly personalized account, Shrestha draws on his own and others' personal narratives, whom he describes as the "victims" of development, to argue in a Franz Fanon-like manner, that the "myth of '*bikas*'" has irreparably 'colonized the minds' of Nepalis (Harper and Tarnowski 2000). Disillusionment with 'development' is not limited to a select group of scholars, or embittered (ex-)government bureaucrats or politicians. Perhaps the most organized is the Maoist movement which has gained considerable strength and sympathy in many of the relatively more remote districts over the last six years, and whose guerrilla tactics have not limited their sights exclusively to government targets. Several development projects, including Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc (CARE), the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development



(ICIMOD), and The Mountain Institute (TMI) have had field offices looted and destroyed, and the entire ‘development’ and donor community blamed for many of Nepal’s current problems, including those associated with the functioning of the government. Less violent displays of this disillusionment are found in the graffiti that has increased in recent years in Kathmandu, Pokhara, and several other large cities across the country. Painted on fences and building walls are such messages as “No More Development,” “We Don’t Need Help,” “Development Go Home,” or the comments I encountered painted on a wall in a prominent square in the *terai* city of Janikpur, “World Bank, IMF, ADB – Go Back!” (Figure 3.1.). But the scale of this criticism is still small, as ‘development’ for the most part remains for politicians, and most of the population, an unquestioned, unquestionable good, and even a ‘human right,’ for all Nepalis.



Figure 3.1: Anti-Development Graffiti

## **Development and the State; the Early Years**

The remainder of this chapter will entail a politico-historical survey of development intervention beginning with US involvement and culminating in the widespread adoption of ‘democracy’ and ‘good governance’ by other donors. In examining Nepal’s history of ‘development,’ or ‘foreign assistance’ as it was termed in the early years of intervention, I will begin by focusing primarily on the ‘development’ efforts of the US in Nepal. In doing so, I will be drawing heavily on USAID’s own account of its development history, *Four Decades of Development: A History of US Assistance to Nepal* (Skerry et al. 1991), an invaluable source not only of USAID’s development programs and their objectives, but also of its perspective and self-reflexive retrospective of its programs. I focus my attention on the US during this period partly because the US was one of the first major donors supporting ‘development’ after Nepal opened its borders to the west, following the King’s return to power in 1951. More importantly, the ‘development’ interventions supported by the US from the 1950s onward have been instrumental in shaping the character of contemporary ‘development’ interventions by most other donors, what might be said to be a fetish with ‘politics’ – with “democratic institution-building,” “governance,” “transparency,” “monitoring,” “record-keeping,” etc. – that has only expanded over the past 5 decades. I later bridge out as other key donors, such as the British, Swiss, World Bank, United Nations, and others begin to focus their efforts on the role of politics, emphasizing ‘participation,’ ‘democracy’ and ‘decentralization’ as dominant themes.

My purpose here is to draw out a couple of important themes that are present within the domain of development and which, more importantly, have had a very strong

influence on the direction and character of the Community Forestry Program. Their relationship within community forestry policy and practice will be examined in detail in the subsequent chapter. A main point at this juncture is that the political nature of development interventions, initially by the US, and later by other donors, has a long history that predates the current trend. Moreover, this history of development also provides a counterbalance to the discussion in the previous chapter, on the history of Nepalese politics. The efforts of the state to expand its administration and bureaucratic reach, to promote decentralization schemes and democratic principles were not activities that arose independently in Nepal. Rather they were very much part of broader, international political interests and events: India's independence in 1947; the partition of India and Pakistan; China's invasion of Tibet in 1959; and more generalized cold war concerns.

### **The State of/and US Development Intervention**

On January 23, 1951, the United States became the first donor to sign an agreement with Nepal to initiate development assistance. This "Agreement for Technical Cooperation," as it was termed, fell under the authority of President Truman's Point IV Program which sought to "support the people of developing countries in their efforts to... build the economic, political, and social institutions which would improve the quality of their lives" (Skerry et al. 1991: 5). Perhaps one of the more important principles advocated by the Point IV Program was that economic and political stability were interdependent. In an effort to adjust to Nepal's political and administrative situation, the United States Overseas Mission ((USOM), the US's agency then charged with administering 'assistance' and the predecessor to the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID)), shifted its program emphasis from direct administration of projects (it's standard approach) to the use of projects as a means to develop government institutions capable of carrying out larger programs on their own. This approach, encapsulated in the term "institution-building, was seen as a means to encourage democracy on a national scale" (Skerry et al. 1991: 11). Most of the projects at the time were, of necessity, staffed and administered by the government, a fact that is not unimportant.

In the early 1950s the chief concern of the United State's 'development' effort was the absence of any government organization at the local level, which was viewed as a constraint, preventing dialogue between villagers and the national government deemed necessary for 'development'. District governors were responsible only for tax collection and police protection but otherwise lacked any other presence at the very 'local' level. According to the comments of an economist asked to review USAID's efforts in Nepal, the government of Nepal "was essentially extractive: removing wealth from the economy to improve ones personal position. The essence was control, not development. That wealth, extracted from farmers and businesspeople, was generally not used productively" (Skerry et al. 1991: 372). Yet, 'control' was hardly possible without any bureaucratic reach. Not surprising, expanding the bureaucracy was to become one of the primary targets for 'development' support the US would provide.

*Four Decades* informs us that when Nepal embarked upon its "unprecedented course of 'development' in 1951, it lacked a clear plan and the administrative capacity to carry out a comprehensive development effort" (Skerry et al. 1991: 12). For this reason, and that the US was the primary donor to Nepal in the 1950s, it had a tremendous

influence on the direction of the government's development priorities as they were spelled out in the First Five-Year Plan. In 1955, under King Mahendra's strong central authority, the government centralized the planning and administration of development activities with the establishment of the Ministry of Planning and Development. Reflecting USAID's desire to create new government institutions and expand the bureaucracy, early His Majesty's Government (HMG) investments were focused primarily on development of basic infrastructure and provision of limited basic government services – though these were highly concentrated in the Kathmandu valley and in the Terai (Skerry et al. 1991: 12). This was to be accomplished with an ambitious plan to expand the Village Development Program nationwide. Implementation began in 1958 with the joint support of USOM, the Indian Aid Mission, and HMG. The goal was to transform the Village Development Program into a nationwide integrated rural development system coordinated by the Ministry of Development and Planning (Skerry et al. 1991: 42). The rural development institution conceived by USOM “was to be an organization known as the Village Development Service, established to contact village people, to find out their needs, and then to get assistance from various departments which would channel programs through this service” (Skerry et al. 1991: 37). Disguised as a rural “development” institution, the VDS was one of the earliest of the US's attempts to use ‘development’ for state expansion.

Support for the VDS was not the only link between ‘development’ and state expansion. The attention and financial support of agricultural, village development, health and educational projects that dominated the ‘development’ landscape prior to 1955 began to undergo a rapid expansion (Mihaly 1965). Not to deny the earnest attempts to

increase agricultural output, improve village infrastructure, reduce illness, and improve literacy, projects in these sectors, according to Mihaly (1965: 70), were supported because they “were thought to offer the best opportunities for increasing support for the government and for widening the base of the government.” As we will see in the following chapter, this is very much the same kind of perspective from which community forestry would be envisaged.

A US Overseas Mission report, published in 1959, was more specific: “The need to expand these (government) services to every district, every area, every village is essential to the successful establishment of a democratic way of life.... Only as a government shows a satisfactory response to the felt needs of its people can a democratic government exist” (USOM 1959, cited in Mihaly 1965: 71). And thus was borne a legacy that would endure for four decades, despite an endless assortment of ‘development’ approaches, fads and fashions. These comments illustrate that the convergence of development, bureaucratic expansion, and democracy, and the belief that they could be administered, which now saturates the development discourse, were linked very early in Nepal.

Mihaly (1965: 75-6) questions whether the US fully appreciated the long-term ramifications of a program to create government institutions. It seems that inherent in US ‘aid’ was a far greater danger than political instability, or the ‘threat of rising expectations’. This was the deepening involvement of the US not only in the inner workings of the government of Nepal but the increasing dependence of the government on US (and other donor nations’) funds (Mihaly 1965: 75). Recall that US assistance was predicated on the belief that government services must be developed if political stability

were to be maintained. Despite seven years of bitter experience with the government – “paralysis” and “incompetence” were terms often used to describe the functioning of the government – no effort was being made to carry out projects as independently of the central government as possible. Quite the contrary, the US intensified efforts to channel aid through the government, in the hope that a sound administrative structure could be constructed despite political instability (Mihaly 1965: 85). By the end of the decade, however, the government apparatus had become even more unwieldy and tortuous than before. Again, this was at least partly due to American efforts, as the wholesale expansion of government and provision of government services had been encouraged and financed by the American mission.

Throughout the 1950s US assistance may have attempted to encourage the “democratization of Nepal” (Mihaly 1965: 115), but there was little evidence of having accomplished anything more than increasing the size of the administration. Ironically, the foreign aid-supported expansion of government administration did not improve the functioning or capacity of the government. As Mihaly remarks, “the very cumbersomeness of the government tended to defeat the purpose of increasing government services” (1965: 84). It has even been argued that despite the huge amounts of ‘assistance,’ the administration’s efficiency had dropped (Skerry et al. 1991: 14). Both of these comments miss the point somewhat, since the “purpose” of the government’s expansion was not solely to improve the delivery of services. Regardless of its efficiency, or even whether it made any real steps in the direction of either economic or political stability, “that HMG administration was extended into rural areas” (Skerry et al. 1991: 11) was believed to be one of major accomplishments of nearly a decade of

support. In other words, it was the expansion of the government that was at the foundation of early development efforts. Development efforts may have been failing on their own terms, but the expansion of the state was proceeding accordingly.

The aid literature of the 1950s and 1960s is a catalogue of acknowledgements – often bewildered – of failure. Projects did not live up to their promise because of incompetent management of planning or execution (Mihaly 1965: 71). This is precisely the scope of criticism of development in Nepal that continues to persist. But administrative problems were not the only ones facing US ‘development’ efforts. Having chosen to work through the government and to base much of its program on building institutions within the government, it found its program highly vulnerable to the winds and storms of contemporary Nepali politics (Mihaly 1965: 72). Frequent dismissals by the king did little to suggest that Nepal was on the path of democracy. If anything, Nepal had come full circle. Political instability following the revolution in 1950, rather than produce a ‘democratic’ system of governance, had merely yielded greater and greater powers for the supposedly ‘constitutional monarchy.’ After a full decade the “king was the absolute ruler of his country, and the constitution was merely a device to make his rule palatable” (Mihaly 1965: 110).

One of the successful products of US assistance was the Central Bureau of Statistics, and the potential for ‘planning’ that it enabled. Comprehensive data with which to identify and assess Nepal’s actual needs – so central to ‘planning’ (Escobar 1992) and ‘legibility’ (Scott 1998) - was practically non-existent in 1951. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Planning published Nepal’s First Five-Year Plan in 1956 (as I mentioned, with input from the US) despite any foundation or statistics. At the time the plan was



formulated, “most of the prerequisites for comprehensive planning were lacking” including “statistics and the agencies for gathering them, manpower information, needs and goals, and coordination and control of planning by HMG” (Skerry et al. 1991: 12). To institute reform, it was reasoned that there must first be a foundation upon which to effect change, as well as reliable statistics with which to assess the potential resource base – human, physical and financial – to determine appropriate reform measures. The highly centralized government administration was “ill-equipped to realistically consider the demographics and needs of its rural majority, making it virtually impossible to plan comprehensive development efforts” (Skerry et al. 1991: 6). This left an obvious course of action. In an effort to address the need for data collection and analysis to make realistic projections concerning development needs, USOM began publishing the “Economic Data Paper” in 1959, as a means to “circulate statistics and encourage analysis leading to better planning of economic development activities” (Skerry et al. 1991: 19).

### ***The Panchayat: A Development Institution***

At the close of the 1950s, the United States Overseas Mission suggested a three-point blueprint for action (Mihaly 1965: 115). This new ‘plan for action’ was quite straightforward. First, the mission stated, transport and communications facilities had to be constructed in order to unify Nepal physically. Second, government services in education, health, and administration had to be expanded. And third, national production needed to be raised in order to finance the activities suggested in the first and second points. The rationale given for this plan of action remained fundamentally political. In

other words, the US and other donors continued to work towards addressing Nepal's lack of physical and administrative infrastructure.

In the early 1960s US assistance was 'redirected' into five major project areas: education and training; government management and institution development; transport development; the development of financial institutions and of private enterprise; and the development of forest resources (Mihaly 1965: 123). Village development projects now came under the development of local-government institutions, part of the *panchayat* program. Nepal's Three-Year Plan (1962-65) showed that Nepali planners were prepared to admit that the administration needed overhauling. The plan spoke of the possible need to change the administrative organization if development requirements so demanded (Mihaly 1965: 134).

In 1960, in an effort to consolidate the decision-making process, King Mahendra reconstituted the National Planning Commission, assigning it responsibility for planning and overseeing implementation of development projects, including allocating funds (such as foreign aid) and manpower. An administration capable of implementing the growing number of development programs necessary to bring about modernization became an increasing preoccupation of government policies and plans. Nepal's Second and Third Plans focused on the development of a national administrative and physical infrastructure (Skerry et al. 1991: 95). The government administration was going to be the means to implement 'development' programs, but the administration would first – or simultaneously – need to be 'developed.'

USAID's program during the 1960s further emphasized 'institution building' programs at the national level. Whereas US programs and their effects were relatively

small-scale in the 1950s, that changed dramatically in the next decade. President Eisenhower's unexpected \$15 million pledge to King Mahendra in April 1960 radically altered the magnitude of US involvement in Nepal's administrative expansion. The \$15 million was intended to assist the newly elected Nepali Congress government to consolidate democracy through the expansion of existing sectoral programs in institution building, large-scale infrastructure investment, participant training, and technology transfer (Skerry et al. 1991: 93-4). The expectation was that by providing Nepal with strong government institutions, through "human resource development" and "democracy strengthening programs," the framework for sustainable economic progress would be established (Skerry et al. 1991: 93).

Starting in 1962 USAID made its assistance contingent upon Nepal's acceptance of an administrative reform program. While attempts to foster reform were relatively insignificant in terms of results, the introduction of 'decentralization' into the development discourse at this time was significant. USAID's comprehensive support for development of public administration included: 1) improved planning and administration of economic development activities; 2) assuming construction costs and operating expenses for HMG ministries, departments, government organizations, local administrative offices, post offices, schools, and libraries; 3) support for implementation of the *Panchayat* system to encourage decentralized administration; and 4) training technical and clerical staff (Skerry et al. 1991: 101). While most assistance was directed at the central government, some was intended to enhance 'decentralization' to the local level to improve implementation and maintenance of development projects. The idea of a 'decentralized administration,' however, did not mean a relinquishing of 'control' from

the center – as authority to plan and make decisions remained at the center – but rather was merely a means to appease donors (primarily its largest donor, the US) to continue their support of the expansion of the administrative apparatus at the local level. In many respects, this set a precedent for the current pattern of administrative expansion under the banner of ‘decentralization.’

A proposed solution to Nepal’s problem of administrative reform to meet its ‘development’ needs came in early 1962. USAID and the American Embassy worked quickly to help HMG adapt the vague concept of the *panchayat* (originally a village-level adjudicative system) to a nationwide system of governance. In passing the *Panchayat* Act (1962), King Mahendra spoke of constructing a ‘democratic’ and ‘decentralized’ power structure in order to provide all citizens with access to economic decision-making and the benefits of development. The ‘new and improved’ *Panchayat* system emphasized ‘*development*’ rather than just ‘*politics*,’ and advocated ‘decentralized’ decision-making at the village and district levels, elected representatives managing local development, and mobilization of local resources. In an effort to deflect any possible criticism of US involvement in Nepal’s political system (which at the time was a controversial issue), the US claimed to be supporting “the ‘development’ side of this new administrative unit, the Department of *Panchayat* Development under Director Tara Dev Bhattarai, rather than the ‘political, law and order’ side” (Skerry et al. 1991: 127). The vision of ‘democracy’ upon which the *panchayat* system was based was a rather crude, even simplistic, conceptualization of ‘decentralization.’ The central government would be responsible for developing policy and financial planning, while communities would be responsible for implementation at the local level.

It is not surprising that USAID was extremely supportive of the *Panchayat* system. It believed that successful implementation of the *Panchayat* system could create the basic socioeconomic and political links necessary to integrate the country, and could provide an administrative network to carry out nationwide development (Skerry et al. 1991: 95). USAID's mushrooming program, as well as its role in supporting the *Panchayat* system, meant an increasing commitment to working with and through the government's administrative apparatus. Between 1961 and 1965, 60-70 percent of USAID assistance went to finance recurring costs in various ministries, and the total US expenditure for the *Panchayat* Development Project from 1962 to 1972 was \$4.2 million (Skerry et al. 1991: 95, 127).

John Cool (USAID's chief of village development) questioned the support directed at developing the *Panchayat* system as a vehicle for social and economic development, and political stability at the local level: he asked, "Can US assistance play an effective role in helping to develop patterns of local government which shore up or replace potentially unstable political systems? Should the US become involved in such political development activities?" (Skerry et al. 1991: 125). The concern reflected in these comments was more about the issue of direct political involvement, which would leave the US open for criticism. Yet, Cool believed that certain factors weighed in favor of US assistance, even if promoting democracy could only be accomplished through support of the administrative apparatus. Most important, was strong support by King Mahendra, who considered the *Panchayat* system "a vehicle through which democracy can be built from the bottom upward in Nepalese society" (Skerry et al. 1991: 125). This meant an opportunity, unavailable before, to develop legally sanctioned local government

bodies and an institutional framework for rural people to actively participate in development. In other words, it became politically expedient to confront these particular 'development' imperatives Nepal faced at the time.

Despite the ambitiousness of the *panchayat* system as a 'decentralized' approach to stimulating 'development' and 'democracy,' that the *Panchayat* system did not deliver what it claimed did not go unnoticed. Disillusionment with the 'grand experiment' first set in with the refusal of the central government to grant authority to districts and villages to raise and use locally collected revenue, part of the larger failure to devolve power to district governments (Skerry et al. 1991: 128). The *Panchayat* system, Cool (1967) believed, may have laid a foundation for involving rural Nepalis directly in development decision-making, but this process was never fully realized. Worse, the political concerns and police responsibilities of the Home Ministry became dominant. Other ministries increasingly re-centralized control of program funds and technicians "with a cultivated disregard for *panchayat* leaders" at the local level (Skerry et al. 1991: 128). Projects often failed to extend their services to areas away from Kathmandu or mobilize support of local leaders. And according to *Four Decades*, "the *Panchayat* Development Project also failed to support equal participation in local decision-making by the poor and less educated ethnic minorities, as traditional landholding elites controlled resources at all levels" (Skerry et al. 1991: 129).

Stronger critics contend that the *panchayat* regime did not intend devolution despite the Local Administration Act, 1965 and the Decentralization Act, 1982, both which strongly espoused the rhetoric of 'decentralization' and even included provisions for 'local governance' (Panday 1999; Gurung 2000). The expressed intention of these

enactments was to enlist people's participation for development and not empowerment of local *panchayats*. Thus, what was delegated was not authority but some functions. Even these measures had limited impact in part due to the pervasive role of central agencies of governance, and in part due to the situation found in most rural areas in the 1960s. That the *panchayat* could fulfill its purpose as a 'development' institution was idealistic, even naively so, in that the population largely lacked the skills to participate in implementing the development plans of the central government: the literacy rate was only 8.9 % in 1960 (Skerry et al. 1991: 95). Many of the criticisms of the 1960s *panchayat* system and related legislation have recently resurfaced. Gurung (2000: 126), perhaps one of the most respected writers on Nepali economic development, recently wrote:

One should not be misled that the recent Local Self-Governance Bill, 1999, as a product of a democratic regime, is more progressive and addresses a devolution agenda as is implied by its nomenclature. It is, in fact, oriented towards decentralization variety of functional delegation. In effect, the output is as in the past, mere transfer of procedures rather than power, or a handing-over of responsibilities instead of withdrawal of power by the center" (Gurung 2000: 126).

Panday echoes these sentiments arguing that the *panchayat* system "was such that institution building for good governance and development became an impossible proposition since everything was to revolve around the king" (1999: 252). In other words, greater 'administration' of society was proceeding, but 'decentralization' wasn't taking place as claimed.

Despite the problems with the *panchayat* system, USAID continued to invest in 'institutional development' outside Kathmandu by constructing zonal, district, and local administrative offices and by training the staff to operate them (Skerry et al. 1991: 103).

USAID also further contributed directly to administrative reform through the General

Public Administration Project (eventually renamed Management Improvement and Training), which aimed to assist HMG in the “development and implementation of an administrative system at all levels of government which can function effectively within the framework of economic, social, and cultural changes taking place in Nepal.” The project sought to turn a static civil service into an efficient agent of modernization. Over the decade, the project grew to encompass subcomponents in statistics development, government budgeting and accounting, and revenue administration, and sought to improve administrative practices in the agriculture, public health, and education sectors (Skerry et al. 1991: 101-2). And through its Statistics Development Project, USAID sought to develop a “competent, efficient, governmental statistics organization to collect, compile and disseminate” statistical data.

In an effort to cite some of the statistics made possible as a result of these efforts, consider the following. In 1951, HMG administration was staffed by approximately 7,000 officials. By 1973, the civil service had expanded to 50,000 with an additional 30,000 employed in various public enterprises. Including teachers, the police, and army, there were nearly 200,000 civil servants, representing roughly half of all wage and salary employment outside agriculture. This growth in numbers of civil servants was further accompanied by the proliferation of government agencies and parastatal enterprises (Skerry et al. 1991: 192). Despite King Birendra’s commitment to administrative reform, by 1979 there were a total of 21 ministries in addition to the national Planning Commission, with roughly 45 subordinated departments, of which 30 were engaged in economic and social affairs. By 1975 there were 60 public enterprises. There is no denying that the administrative apparatus had expanded considerably.



By the early 1970s USAID, the World Bank and other major aid agencies began to shift their policies in favor of promoting ‘rural development.’ Stemming from the realization that as much as 40 percent of the rural population was living below the poverty line, discussion also turned towards satisfying “basic needs,” developing “appropriate technology,” and fostering “people’s participation” - a shift which took concrete form in the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development held by FAO in 1979 (Cernea 1985; Chambers 1983, 1985; Chambers and Ghildyal 1985; Chambers et al 1989; Harriss 1982). While these were not necessarily new concepts, they were taking on new meaning - or renewed meaning - in Nepal (and other developing countries). The basic idea underlying rural development was to make development more appropriate to the conditions of rural people for meeting their basic needs.

The 1973 passage of the *New Directions* legislation placed a new emphasis on meeting peoples’ basic needs through small-scale technical assistance projects. USAID’s new development approach was based on the principle of ‘growth with equity’ (Skerry et al. 1991: 182), which amounted to nothing more than a new spin on development with ‘democracy’ through ‘decentralization.’ The regional development strategy introduced in the Fourth and Fifth Plans reiterated the theme of ‘decentralization,’ because “effective development was difficult to achieve under a highly centralized government administration” (Skerry et al. 1991: 193). In the process, USAID increasingly emphasized the role of research and planning in ensuring effective projects, as well as the importance of project “monitoring” and “evaluation” deemed important features of “institutional development” (Skerry et al. 1991: 185).

This marks the rise in the importance of ‘decentralization’ as a key concept – along with ‘democracy’ – in the development discourse in Nepal. What is perhaps most interesting about the convergence of development, democracy, and decentralization is its relationship to the state and its expansion. No longer was the primary goal one of constructing an administrative apparatus that could support the all-round development of Nepal, but the now dominant vision of this administrative apparatus was that it supports the decentralization of authority to the local level. What made ‘decentralization’ particularly valuable was the degree to which it resonated so well with ‘democracy,’ i.e., a decentralized administrative system was considered to be a democratic system. This should not, however, be construed as a paradigm shift in development, but rather an example of the polyvalence of development, its ability to assimilate these concepts without any fundamental change in the ‘way things get done.’ In Nepal, development becomes inflected with these new fields, such that governance, human rights, and the degree of democratization become criteria by which to judge the extent of development in Nepal. But this is not all there is to it. Development is a human right in the context of Nepal; development must be ‘democratic,’ and this is signified by the presence of such features as transparency, accountability, record-keeping, monitoring, and others, which fill the double role of serving also as prerequisites for development. (This is also one of the reasons why community forestry is so highly regarded; it simultaneously epitomizes decentralization and democracy.)

‘Development’ efforts in the 1980s continued to shift to a more micro form of management. While this might be interpreted as a movement away from involvement in ‘politics’ or the ‘affairs of the state,’ these mostly small-scale projects did a great deal in

continuing to expand the state's reach to the local level through administrative expansion. USAID's program aimed at accelerating the modernization of the government's institutional capacity to plan, evaluate, and administer development programs and to improve national service delivery systems in a 'decentralized' manner. Institutional development, including training, was considered basic to USAID project and program successes. This 'decentralized development administration' was encouraged through its regionally-based integrated rural development projects, and through assistance to HMG and Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs). USAID further sought to improve HMG administration by incorporating 'monitoring' and 'evaluation' components in its projects, and reinforcing these with in-country training (Skerry et al. 1991: 272). It was assumed that the benefits of improved administration and economic performance at the central level would improve the ability of rural communities to participate in national development (Skerry et al. 1991: 267). Yet, the 1980s, not unlike the previous three decades of 'development,' witnessed only limited progress in 'decentralizing' the 'development administration.' It became painfully obvious that the highly centralized government administration allowed little productive interaction between the center and rural areas, and despite the assortment of 'development' models provided by foreign donors, 'development' efforts only seemed to reinforce a top-down structure emphasizing central planning. "The lack of genuine commitment to decentralizing fiscal and administrative responsibilities, combined with a persistent shortage of skilled manpower," (Skerry et al. 1991: 272) were among many 'problems' blamed for a failure to 'decentralize.'

### **More Donors, More *bikas*?**

Several other donors have figured prominently in Nepal's 'development' endeavor(s). India, the United Nations (and the World Health Organization (WHO)), the Ford Foundation, Switzerland, Russia, and China were amongst the earliest along with the United States. Their interests were also political and strategic, though their approach was much less direct than that taken by the US. Although India was involved in the Rural Development Scheme, much of their 'development' assistance was in support of basic infrastructure; roads, airports, schools, and hospitals. The significant UN projects were the malaria-eradication program in the Terai, a nurses' training hospital, and dairy development by the FAO (Mihaly 1965). The Ford Foundation supported a (relatively unsuccessful) cottage industry center. Initial Swiss support, not surprisingly, began with the construction of a number of dairy and cheese plants in Kathmandu and the surrounding area. Chinese aid helped to build roads, especially a road linking Kathmandu to China (Tibet). Russian support was primarily financial, though also helped to build a hospital

It was not until 1964 that the British began to take on a role in Nepal. One reason for this somewhat late start is very likely due to its changed status in India. This is also likely one of the reasons why Britain's Overseas Development Agency (ODA, later renamed the Department for International Aid, DFID) shied away from anything that was at all political in nature, at least in its early years. The earliest projects it supported were in education and military training. Only later in the 1970s and 1980s did they begin to fund projects in health, agriculture, forestry, and other resource sectors.

Table 3.1. Foreign donors and financial support (millions of US dollars)

Donors	Total Amount 1951-1971	Total Amount 1972-1991	Total Amount 1951-1991
<b>Bilateral</b>			
1. OECD (Net ODA)			
USA	164.6	271.0	435.6
UK	7.3	285.4	292.7
Germany	2.2	353.0	355.2
Switzerland	2.8	154.4	157.2
Australia	1.3	30.1	31.4
New Zealand	0.3	3.8	4.1
Canada	1.3	105.1	106.4
Japan	1.07	10.47	11.54
Denmark	0.0	54.7	54.7
Finland	0.0	82.3	82.3
France	0.0	87.5	87.5
Netherlands	0.0	53.1	53.1
Norway	0.0	42.6	42.6
Austria	0.0	12.4	12.4
Italy	0.0	10.1	10.1
Sweden	0.0	0.7	0.7
Belgium	0.0	7.5	7.5
Total of 1.	180.8	2264.1	2444.9
2. NON-OECD			
USSR	19.6	n.a.	19.6
India	127.3	242.2	369.5
China	39.0	204.9	243.9
Total of 2	185.9	447.1	633.0
Total of 1+2	366.7	2711.2	3077.9
3. MULTILATERAL			
IDA/IBRD	4.2	666.6	670.8
ADB	12.4	509.0	521.4
IMF Trust Fund	0.0	6.6	6.6
Colombo Plan/UN	20.3	-	20.3
UN Agencies	0.0	357.5	357.5
IFAD	0.0	56.5	56.5
Other Multilateral	0.0	61.2	61.2
Arab/OPEC	0.0	13.5	13.5
Total of 3	36.9	1670.9	1707.8
<b>Total (1+2+3)</b>	<b>403.6</b>	<b>4382.1</b>	<b>4785.7</b>

Source: Khadka 1997

By the 1980s, other western donors had pretty much followed suit, funding projects in which ‘participation,’ ‘satisfying basic needs,’ ‘community development,’ and

‘farmer first’ approaches were being written into project designs, regardless of whether the projects dealt with resource management, health, education, or small-scale income generating activities. As the 1990s approached, the ‘good governance’ agenda of the World Bank became a conditionality for funding, while donors shifted their support to include projects designed to include gender equity and ‘institutional capacity building’. Other than the US, the British (DfID), Swiss (SIDA), Germans (GTZ), Danish (DANNIDA), and Australian (AusAid) have all written these components into their projects, and especially those supporting community forestry.

Not unlike the Lesotho described by Ferguson (1990), Nepal has obviously attracted an unusual amount of attention from an unusually large number of sources. Sterling (1976) writing in the 1970s, noted that some 700 organizations were engaged in some kind of ‘development’ endeavor. Perhaps more frightening is the remarkably large amount of funding Nepal has received between 1951 and 1991 (Table 3.1.).

### **Development, Decentralization, and Democracy**

*The participation of the local bodies and communities including the district level representatives in the development campaign is more important now than ever, not the least because decentralization is a sine qua non of democracy and a prerequisite for equitable development.... Decentralization in the sense of devolution of power and participatory development deepens democracy... at the same time, it facilitates development even as it automatically makes the distribution of its fruits more widely spread.*

Devendra Raj Panday (1999: 117)

*There can be no debate on democratization that brings freedom and empowerment to the people.*

Harka Gurung (2000: 124)

The ‘People’s Democratic Movement’ (*jana andolan*) of 1990-91 not only changed Nepal’s political system, from a ‘constitutional monarchy’ to a *proper*

‘democracy,’ it also ushered in a profound popularization for all things ‘democratic,’ and not surprisingly, a renewed enthusiasm and commitment to the relationship between ‘development,’ “decentralization,” and “democracy.” As Gurung remarks, “the free-market agenda of the 1980s was appended with good governance, human rights, and democratization as aid conditionalities” (2000: 124). Moreover, these dominant notions have become rewoven together in ways that have had a bearing on how projects in a great many sectors, including community forestry, have become envisaged.

In essence USAID’s development strategy for the 1990s has shown little change from previous decades, continuing it’s dedication to strengthening democracy in Nepal through the pursuit of “democratic reform and economic liberalization initiatives” (Skerry et al. 1991: 360). If anything, the trend towards democratization and economic liberalization in Nepal (just as in Eastern Europe) has provided opportunities for USAID to increase the scope of its assistance programs to include initiatives that have long formed basic tenets of the Agency’s philosophy, namely political and economic pluralism. The changes USAID sought to facilitate (e.g., enhancing political and social pluralism, free market participation, and individual choice) were to be accomplished by encouraging “policy reform and decentralization of financial planning and administrative responsibilities, supporting indigenous non-governmental organizations, and encouraging private sector development and community participation” (Skerry et al. 1991: 365). The similarities between this statement and the rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s is not surprising. The belief that “‘participatory forms of development’ in a wide range of projects would encourage citizens to take part in discussions, planning and economic decision-making, and that this kind of ‘active management and participation’ seen as

signs of ‘democracy’ would lead to stronger, more successful projects” (Skerry et al. 1991: 365) continued to have a place at the heart of USAID’s ‘development’ strategy.

The increasing salience of ‘democracy’ through the 1990s produced an interesting shift, indeed a reversal, in the relationship between economic and political processes.

The ‘development’ discourse through to the 1970s (what has been described as dominated by ‘modernization theories’) argued that economic growth was prerequisite for social change towards democratization. Recall that USAID believed that economic stability would provide a basis for political stability (Skerry et al. 1991; Mihaly 1965). In the last decade, however, political development, i.e., ‘democratization,’ is now increasingly considered as central to sustained economic growth (Gurung 2000: 127).

This reading of the past 5 decades of ‘development’ as a flip-flopping of means and ends – of political stability (‘democracy’) and economic stability (free, open markets, increased production, etc.) – overlooks, however, the degree to which ‘democratization’ is a means to a ‘democratic’ society in all respects. ‘Democratic development’ (equated with ‘institutional capacity building,’ transparency, record-keeping, monitoring, etc.) is certainly pursued as a means through which to achieve success in a variety of development projects – many of which it should be stressed are not even ‘economic’ in the strict sense – but it is also an end in itself, irrespective of its relationship with other aims, economic or otherwise.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, rather than ask what development is, or is not, ‘what went wrong,’ how it failed, or how it can be more accurately or precisely defined, better theorized, or sustainably practiced, rather than provide an alternative kind of development or an



alternative to development (Crush 1995: 3), my focus has been to examine the relationship between development and politics in Nepal. Although attempts to centralize state control are part of a trend that dates back at least to the unification of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the period since the 1950s is marked by a significant growth in the state apparatus. In this chapter, I have traced the growth of ‘development’ in Nepal as it has acted as a catalyst in state formation. In doing this, I have examined what it is that development does, but in a manner that has seldom been explored previously in Nepal’s context. USAID’s involvement in state formation, mirrored by other donors in the 1990s, has been significant not only because it was quite directly involved in politics (and ‘government’) in Nepal (despite frequent denials) but also in that it established a framework within which other projects, most notably those in the forestry sector, came to operate. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A HISTORY OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY: FROM ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

#### **Narratives of Community Forestry**

Community forestry, I have been told on countless occasions, “is Nepal’s most successful development program.” This statement might prompt a researcher to define and measure several criteria in order to test this claim. For example, are communities ‘sustainably’ managing local forests? Has forest cover increased? Are forest products, such as fuelwood, fodder, timber, in greater abundance? Do community forests adequately supply the needs of the communities’ users? Have landslides, soil erosion, and/or other environmental problems been reduced as a result of community management of forests? Some researchers might even be prompted to ask, how is ‘success’ defined?, and by whom? While these are important questions, my aim in this chapter takes a different approach. The main questions I wish to pose here is, how is it that community forestry has become a ‘development’ program?, and as a ‘development’ program, what are its objectives? In this chapter I also explore several conventional narratives of Nepal’s forest management history that have come to shape visions of what community forestry is, its purpose(s), aims, objectives, strategies, and its effects (a subject I will examine in greater detail in the following chapter). Although I am forced to draw on these narratives, my goal is to (re-)present them from a slightly different perspective, in order to focus specifically on the questions I have posited above. To be more precise, I

attempt to map the trajectory of community forestry, to explore the emergence and transformation of community forestry as a product of powerful historical, political, environmental, and development imperatives. In fashioning my historical narrative, I argue that community forestry, while not completely abandoning its primarily environmentalist and conservationist/ protectionist origins, has become a ‘development’ program concerned with such conventional ‘development’ goals as those discussed in the previous chapter: poverty elimination, community development, income generation, and most important in recent years the fostering of democracy and decentralization.

A number of scholars have provided ‘histories’ of Nepal’s forest management and legislation: some recount old forest laws dating back as far as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (Bajracharya & Amatya 1993; Gautam 1993), others concentrate on the period since 1900 (Mahat et al. 1986a, 1986b, 1988), or even more recently, since the 1950s (Bajracharya 1983b; Joshi 1991; Gilmour & Fisher 1991; Talbott & Khadka 1993; Guthman 1997; Graner 1997). One of the most cited accounts of community forestry is Gilmour and Fisher’s (1991) *Villagers, Forests, and Foresters*. The authors discuss how community forestry represents a marked shift, akin to a ‘paradigm shift’ in the Kuhnian sense, from a ‘tree-centered’ to a ‘people-centered’ approach to forest management. In the former, ‘tree-centered’ approach, the aim is to increase the forest stand, without much attention directed at the needs of local villagers using and reliant on nearby forests. In contrast, a ‘people-centered’ approach considers the needs of local people as central to the forestry endeavor.

For the most part, these ‘histories’ tend to separate forest management into a set of periods, perhaps most popular among them, a period in which forests were exploited

by the state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a source of revenue, to state controlled protection of forests from local villagers, and finally to the present, enlightened community forestry approach. Often they tend to focus on how the management of forests was initially in the hands of foresters but has shifted to control vested in local forest users. These histories also tend to portray the changing policies and legislation as the product of a simple, natural, progressive evolution, leaving many of the principles and assumptions underlying the various policies and legislation unproblematicized. In this chapter, I offer an alternative way of conceptualizing a ‘history’ of community forestry; that is, as a transition in forest management that took shape first as the product of a series of environmental concerns that were replaced by (though not entirely discarded for) development objectives. In particular, I explore how and when ‘community forestry’ emerged, how it has changed, and some of the main influences responsible for these changes. And following Ferguson (1990) and Guthman (1997), my purpose is not so much to scrutinize the particular hypotheses, aims and objectives that underpin the program (though this is important and necessary), but rather to provide an historical and political context to its evolution and the practices associated with it.

### **Legislating Forest Protection**

Early initiatives in forest management in Nepal tended to focus on the shortage of fuelwood and its effect on deforestation as the issues of greatest importance.<sup>28</sup> Prompted by the perceived decline in the condition of the nation’s forests, together with the recommendations of several donor agencies, the Nepal government enacted the Private

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<sup>28</sup> Despite the widespread belief that fuelwood was linked to deforestation, the overwhelming emphasis on fuelwood alone was discomfiting for the lack of regard for farmers equally important fodder (for livestock), agricultural and other needs.

Forest Nationalization Act, 1957, followed shortly thereafter by the *Birta* Abolition Act, 1959 (and later by the Land Reforms Act, 1964, and the Pastureland Nationalization Act, 1974).<sup>29</sup> In eradicating the *birta* system of tenure - believed to be a hindrance to effective forest management – the Private Forest Nationalization Act sought to “protect, manage, and conserve the forests for the benefit of the entire country” (Bajracharya 1983b: 234). Under the Forest Nationalization Act’s guidelines, all forest land was to be placed under the control of the Forest Department, which would perform a “policing and licensing role” to ensure an adequate system of protection and maintenance of forest resources.

Since the 1980s a series of criticisms have been leveled at the Forest Nationalization Act. To begin with, given the extremely limited capacity of the Forest Department (which had only four professional foresters on staff), a mandate of protection and policing was highly unrealistic. From the perspective of the valorization of community forestry and ‘putting people first’ the Private Forest Nationalization Act was problematic for its failure to recognize that most forest land - as much as 50 percent of the total land cover (Gilmour 1989: 26) - was being utilized by millions of Nepalis who depended on it for their basic subsistence needs. Another common perception is that the Private Forest Nationalization Act led to indiscriminate cutting of forests, widespread conversion of forests to farmland and a corresponding loss of local interest in forest protection (FAO/World Bank 1979; Bajracharya 1983a; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1974; Mahat et al., 1987a, 1987b; Gilmour and Fisher 1991). According to this perspective, the demand for forest products was already at an alarming rate as a consequence of

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<sup>29</sup> These Acts were designed to reinforce forest legislation with respect to government ownership over most forest land and to define limitations on individual forest and pastureland holdings (Mahat et al. 1986a).

increasing population. The Private Forest Nationalization Act then did little to actually protect existing forests as landowners purposefully deforested their land in an attempt to prevent their holdings from being nationalized. This last criticism is rather interesting in that it challenges the state's role and capacity in legislating forest protection and management.

More recently, the 'fact' that the Private Forest Nationalization Act caused widespread deforestation has been questioned. Gilmour and Fisher (1991) have observed that "contrary to the view that rural people reacted to the 1957 legislation by destroying forests is the observation that a great number of indigenous forest management systems (which were commonly set up by villagers to protect degrading forests) had their origins about 1960.<sup>30</sup> (This date marked the beginning of a period of relative social and political stability, which, some have argued, is a precondition for such indigenous communal initiatives.) Thus, rather than villagers losing control of their forests at this time, many were in fact asserting communal influence to protect forests. Because these activities were all "extra-legal" they were largely unknown by the bureaucracy" (Gilmour and Fisher 1991: 12). The actual effect of the Act remains open to debate. In those areas accessible to Forest Department staff the Act was likely to have disrupted indigenous forest management. However, as much of the country remained beyond the reach of control and as many people were (and still remain) unaware of the legislative change it is unlikely to have caused such a drastic and immediate effect (Gilmour and Fisher 1991: 12; Acharya 1989). For example, in Manohar (as I will discuss further in Chapter 8) the

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<sup>30</sup> This is in addition to the vast number of "indigenous" and "traditioinal" management systems, often of a supra-legal nature, that have persisted throughout Nepal long before the Private Forest Nationalization Act (*see* Chhetri & Pandey 1992).

descendents of a local *rajya* remained in control of a forest as part of a *birta* land grant, which the family held until 1998 when the forest was finally transferred to a newly formed community forestry user group.

### **Escalating Enforcement**

Through the 1960s, 1970s and well into the 1980s, the bias towards protecting forests remained paramount. Following the constitutional crisis of 1960, which led to Nepal's adoption of the party-less *panchayat* system of government (discussed in Chapter 2), the next step taken in the direction of forest protection occurred with the introduction of the Forest Act, 1961. Under this new Forest Act, land was to be made available for small private forest plots, while the new village *panchayats* were to be given authorization to manage designated areas of government forests according to the directions of the Forest Department (Mahat et al 1986a; Acharya 1989: 18). Regardless of the progressiveness of these provisions, no action was actually taken in implementing them; the legal status of the forests was to remain in a hiatus for a further 15 years (Gilmour et al 1989: 27).

Shortly thereafter, the Forest Protection (Special Arrangement) Act, 1967 was introduced. Its purpose was to strengthen the 'enforcement role' of the Forest Department by defining forest offenses and prescribing penalties - twin issues which continue to hold a great deal of attention in community forestry. And to assist the Forest Department in the conservation of forest resources, especially with its *policing* functions, the Forest Preservation Special Courts were created. The Forest Protection Act proved to be of limited use, however, as its implementation was at times somewhat selective.

According to Mahat et al (1986a: 230), in actual practice "it was only the weaker section

of society which was brought under the purview of this law enforcement activity and powerful individuals involved in offenses often escaped through influence and manipulation.” Recent videos and radio programs on community forestry often include portrayals of ‘local elites’ who continue to escape prosecution, but who can be brought to justice by locals through their own policing efforts.

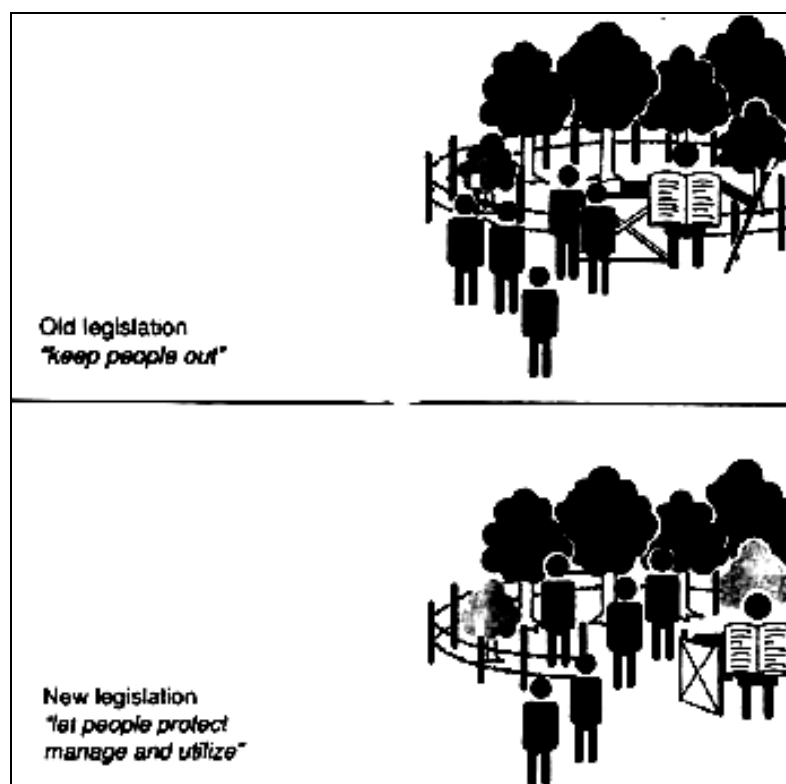


Figure 4.1. The Forest Department’s changing attitudes to forest protection.

Source: His Majesty’s Government, Nepal 1991.

### **Fuelwood and Deforestation: The Making of a ‘Crisis’**

*Two words come to mind when considering the forest resources of Nepal: “dependence” and “degradation.” Dependence because 90% of the people of Nepal are engaged in agricultural pursuits that largely depend on forests to provide a wide variety of inputs. “Degradation” because overexploitation, particularly in the Middle Mountains and lowland Terai has resulted in the*



*destruction or serious degradation of large areas of forests over the past 100 years.*

A.L Joshi, *preface* to Talbott & Khadka (1994: 2)

The quote above, written in 1994 and relatively late considering its heavy environmental slant, echoes the importance of forest products to people's livelihood as well as the environmental imperatives behind the alarmist reactions that from early on stimulated policy and legislative changes in forest management. In what constitutes the dominant narrative of the history of community forestry, two events are given credit for drawing attention towards the developing world's dependence on forest products and the potential for an environmental crisis to occur. The first event was the energy 'crisis' inspired by the 1973 jump in oil prices, while the second was the growing 'environmental movement' of the early 1970s sparked by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in 1972. As western, industrialized countries became acutely sensitive to the 'energy crisis,' environmental concerns were further heightened by Eckholm's (1975) "The Other Energy Crisis: Firewood." In this short, alarmist article, Eckholm stressed the implications of the developing world's "daily scramble" for fuelwood. Unlike industrialized countries, the article points out, energy consumption in the rural areas of developing countries is derived almost entirely from 'non-commercial' sources, such as fuelwood, dung cakes and crop residues. Eckholm (and popular wisdom at the time) believed that the demand for fuelwood was outstripping the supply and leading to deforestation. This would, in turn, force villagers to use dung cakes and crop residues as fuel rather than for use as organic manures. Fuelwood demand was being perceived not only as a leading factor in the loss of tree cover, but also for the declining productivity of

food production systems, the deterioration in land use, and even for adversely affecting peoples diets.<sup>31</sup>

The link between meeting subsistence, nutritional needs and the effect on environmental stability was further elaborated upon by Eckholm (1976), Sterling (1976) and others as they attempted to raise world awareness of an impending environmental 'crisis' affecting the whole of the Himalayan region:

There is no better place to begin an examination of deteriorating mountain environments than Nepal. In probably no other mountain country are the forces of ecological degradation building so rapidly and visibly...

Population growth... is forcing farmers onto ever steeper slopes, slopes unfit for sustained farming... Meanwhile, villagers must roam farther and farther from their homes to gather fodder and firewood, thus surrounding most villages with a widening circle of denuded hillsides. Ground-holding trees are disappearing fast... Landslides that destroy lives, homes, and crops occur more and more frequently...

Topsoil washing down into India and Bangladesh is now Nepal's most precious export... As fertile soil slips away, the productive capacity of the hills declines, even while the demand for food grows inexorably (Eckholm 1975: 764-5).

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<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion and a case study of the fuelwood issue in an east Nepal Hill Region, as well as for its policy implications, see Bajracharya (1983b). Messerschmidt (1994) also discusses cooking fuel from the perspective of applying the 'anthropological approach to indigenous knowledge' to community forestry development. Perhaps one of the more detailed accounts of this process of insufficient supply of fuelwood leading to declining food productivity is found in Ives and Messerli's (1989) *The Himalayan Dilemma*.

Recently, more detailed studies of a wide range of situations in which the fuelwood supply situation had been identified as worsening have suggested that fuel shortages and their effect upon the productivity of agricultural systems may be much less than had been understood initially (Arnold 1991: 7). Moreover, the extent of such shortages may vary significantly from one area to another, even within a small region (Bajracharya 1983b). It is now understood that much of the wood used for fuel often comes from dead wood, or trees and shrubs outside of forest areas, so that the drain on the forest growing stock is reduced; that alternative fuels, such as crop residues and dried dung, may account for a sizable part of overall use, and that these non-forest and non-wood resources may be renewing themselves, or are being renewed, at rates able to sustain current levels of use (Arnold 1991: 7-8). Two important conclusions can be drawn from this. First, it may not be the case that decreasing availability of wood necessarily leads to shortages of fuel. Second, and perhaps more importantly for its implications on forest policy, it is not clear that planting trees specifically selected to produce fuelwood rather than a mix of products is necessarily an appropriate response where fuel shortages do exist (Arnold 1991: 7).

Environmental concerns, and especially the notion that the demand for fuelwood was one of the main causes of deforestation and environmental instability, were heightened still further when the disastrous flooding in the plains of South Asia in 1977 was attributed to prior notions of an apparent accelerated reduction in tree cover in Nepal (Ives and Messerli 1989).

Concern with the environmental crisis afflicting Nepal and the rest of the Himalayas reached its apex in what Ives and Messerli (1989) have described as the “Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation” (hereafter referred to as the *Theory*). Although the *Theory* is meant to encompass the entire Himalayan region, much of the focus (and blame) has been directed at Nepal as the area of greatest concern. As spelled out by Ives and Messerli (1989: 8-9), the basic assumptions underlying the *Theory* are as follows:

1. A population explosion was initiated shortly after World War II due to the introduction of modern health care and medicine and the reduction of malaria and other diseases;
2. Increased population in subsistence mountain societies has led to:
  - (a) reduced amount of land per family
  - (b) deepening poverty
  - (c) massive deforestation;
3. Mountain deforestation, on such a scale, will result in total loss of all accessible forest cover in a country such as Nepal by AD 2000, and is the cause of accelerating soil erosion and increased incidence of landslides;
4. Destabilized mountain slopes resulting from points 1, 2, and 3 above cause:
  - (a) increased flooding on the Ganges and Brahmaputra plains,
  - (b) extension of the delta and formation of islands in the Bay of Bengal,
  - (c) drying up of wells and springs in the hills and lower dry-season river levels downstream,
  - (d) massive siltation and drastic reduction in the useful life of highly expensive water resource projects;
5. Deforestation also leads to climatic change in general and reduced rainfall amounts in particular.

By the mid-1980s, however, this ‘supercrisis,’ and the assumptions upon which the *Theory* was based, became increasingly challenged by a growing body of researchers. In a series of earlier papers by Thompson, Warburton, Hatley and Pitt, came the first challenges to the ‘supercrisis’ scenario. In 1986 the Mohonk Mountain Conference was convened to further discuss the Himalayan situation, with a diverse group of researchers, environmentalists and development practitioners in attendance (Fisher 1990: 69).

In their insightful and influential (and provocative) paper “Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale,” Thompson and Warburton (1985, see also 1996) draw into question the certainty of the relationship between deforestation in the hills and mountains of Nepal and flooding along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers. In exploring the so-called ‘facts’ - as well as the myths that have been constructed while the Himalayan environment is supposedly collapsing - the authors discuss the many problems inherent in both the premises and conclusions of much of the ‘scientific’ research that has been carried out in the Himalayas. Though not questioning that a problem of some sort does certainly exist, one of the central issues at the heart of Thompson and Warburton’s discussion is the “technical [i.e., scientific] uncertainty that is encountered in analyzing the human components of erosion, flooding and shifting hydrological patterns” (1985: 118). As they point out, it is the “uncertainty” that is most troublesome (Thompson and Warburton 1985: 131):

Uncertainty as to whether the consumption of fuelwood exceeds or is comfortably within the rate of production, uncertainty as to whether deforestation is a widespread or localized phenomenon, uncertainty as to whether it is population pressures or inappropriate institutional arrangements that lie behind instances of mismanagement of renewable resources... uncertainty as to whether deforestation in the hills (if it indeed exists) has any serious impact on the flooding in the plains.

Building on the work of Thompson, Warburton and others, *The Himalayan Dilemma* (Ives and Messerli 1989) provides the most extensive critique of the *Theory*. Ives and Messerli conclude that, while there are major problems to be encountered in the Himalayas, they are not of ‘supercrisis’ proportions. Similar to many of the earlier papers that address the uncertainty of the situation, they focus their attack on the Theory’s underlying assumptions. They point out the following:<sup>32</sup>

1. There is little evidence of massive recent deforestation in the Himalayas.
2. There exists several ‘myths and misunderstandings’ regarding the role of forests in hydrology and soil erosion;
  - (a) that contrary to popular beliefs cutting of forests usually results in the ‘water-table moving closer to the surface, as less water is lost to evapotranspiration, and
  - (b) that the tree canopy itself is of little importance in reducing sheet erosion, which is affected by ground cover and ‘low vegetation’.
3. The construction of agricultural terraces often serves to stabilize land.
4. There is no evidence that deforestation in the Hills leads to any significant increased flooding on the Ganges and Brahmaputra plains.
5. Since the geophysical features of the Himalaya are intrinsically unstable, attempts to measure the impact of human intervention is impossible.

Ives and Messerli’s main contention is that the ‘facts’ are either totally inadequate or, in some cases, actually supports the opposite conclusion. Nevertheless, they argue that there remains an urgent need to address worsening environmental and economic problems. However, they also believe that the most appropriate developmental response is one that is holistic, flexible, localized, and most importantly, one that views the local farmer as part of the solution and not simply a cause of the problem.

### **Environmentalist Concerns, Donor Funding**

Perhaps one of the most important consequences of the debate surrounding the *Theory*, its overall relevance to this discussion, was its effects as a stimulus for both

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<sup>32</sup> See Fisher’s (1990) Review Essay for a concise summary of *The Himalayan Dilemma* (1989).

development and forestry in the Himalayas in general, and Nepal in particular. With regard to development, it was hugely instrumental in prompting donor agencies from around the world to spend billions of dollars in aid (in the form of loans and grants) to fund an assortment of environmentally related projects. By the mid-1970s as many as 700 NGOs had ties with Nepal (Sterling 1976: 14), reflecting a multitude of interests and an equally diverse set of ambitions (not all of them environmental). And then there is, of course, the opportunity Nepal afforded the development community as an experimental playground or “development laboratory” (Fujikura 1996: 296). As Thompson and Warburton point out, the whole international development community - the professional foresters, conservationists, agronomists, etc. - also need “serious (but curable) environmental problems” (1985: 131).

One seldom asked question is why Nepal was targeted for such an extensive amount of ‘development’ attention. Concern with the extent of recent deforestation, and its contribution to lowland flooding, had serious political and aid implications. Politically, there was the tension that the ‘crisis’ has caused between India and Nepal. While much of this aid money was for humanitarian reasons, this is only a small part of the explanation. Financial aid to Nepal also had links to political and strategic motives. With the potential for animosity between India and Nepal to grow, support from American aid agencies in particular, was a means to appease Indian authorities and foster better relations for the future (Mihaly 1963). For example, Indian newspapers had repeatedly run articles blaming Nepal for the destruction and high costs of relief caused by flooding along the Ganges. Aid was also strategically valuable since Nepal was an

important buffer between communist China to the north and democratic India to the south.

### **Forest Management as Forestry Project**

The first concerted effort by Nepal to assess the problems of deforestation, soil erosion, and landslides came following the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. In 1974, a Task Force on Land Use and Erosion Control was established within the Planning Commission. One of the first recommendations of the Task Force was to suggest separate measures for the Mountain, Hill, and Terai regions (Bajracharya 1983b: 233). The Mountain Region was perceived as an area where resources were under-used and intensive development efforts were needed. The Hill Region was believed to be the area with the greatest problem of environmental instability. The scarcity of usable land and the simultaneous deterioration of land resources meant that a more “conservation-oriented land-use pattern” was considered appropriate. The recommendation was therefore to “concentrate on afforestation,” especially on extensive unused or misused tracts where “softwood silviculture” could be practiced. In the Terai, the problem was held to be a choice between agricultural land expansion and forest area preservation. The adopted solution was to maintain forests on poorer soils and expand agriculture on better soils. Nevertheless, the commercial exploitation of Terai forests has continued unabated.

The tone set by the Task Force was followed up more specifically in the Fifth Plan, 1975-80. According to Bajracharya (1983b: 234), the key policy issues addressed in the Plan were formulated to: (1) implement the forest working plan in the entire Terai area, with appropriate modifications as necessary; (2) determine the pattern of commercial and domestic consumption of wood and adopt appropriate policies; (3)

abolish the present system of auctioning, clear-felling, and marketing trees and implement plans in accord with regional development schemes; (4) plant trees for conservation and development of forest resources and also the enhancement of natural resources in general; and (5) establish a separate department so as to implement control of soil erosion on a large scale.

Bajracharya (1983b: 234-5) further remarks that a conspicuous problem with the Fifth Plan was that although it was explicit about the need to control deforestation, soil erosion, and landslides, and in this respect differs significantly from the previous plans and policies, it still neither incorporated the needs, aspirations, and abilities of the people, nor recognized their problems and limitations. In other words, forestry plans were still an expansion of previous programs that were devised by the state for objectives the state defined as important. While the Department of Soil and Water Conservation was established and mandated to act on the technical aspects of the problem, forest management policies had yet to shift toward meeting people's minimum basic needs and directing people's participation in the development programs.

In their review of community forestry, Gilmour and Fisher (1991) describe how the traditional aim of early "forestry development" through the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s followed a pro-industrialization model (mimicking the current 'development' models of the period), typified by large plantations with uniform management plans, imported rather than local technology, and a view that the forests should be protected from encroachment by local people who were held to be a major obstacle to effective (and 'scientific') management and utilization. As part of such an outlook, it was typical for forest services to focus only on trees within areas defined as 'forests.' Tree species



that had been domesticated and adopted as agricultural crops usually came only under the purview of agricultural services, so that most tree stocks maintained by rural people remained effectively ignored - if not completely unnoticed - by foresters (Arnold 1991: 1). This is not to say that this brand of 'forestry development' neglected providing forest products to rural people; however, forest service activities were usually pursued through a scaled down version of the conventional parameters of forestry management to the level of a village or community woodlot (Arnold 1991: 1). Villagers would be given the added responsibility of managing and protecting these plantations, while it was assumed that they would also receive benefits from employment or the supposed spin-offs generated by the forests' contribution to industrialization and economic growth. Within such plantation-oriented forestry projects villagers were rarely more than mere target groups and/or consumers who would need to be enlightened as to the importance of preserving and wisely utilizing forest products.

Some of the more common tales circulating about village plantation projects recount how the newly planted seedlings were seldom maintained and managed, and sometimes even uprooted not long after being planted – by the villagers themselves who feared that the forest would eventually be taken back by the government. These examples of failed plantation projects only added to the notion, prevalent at the time, of ignorant villagers who lack, and need, scientific knowledge in order to manage local forests. These notions were not monopolized by foresters or ex-patriot forestry 'experts. When discussing local management practices with villagers, I frequently encountered people who had adopted the idea that they needed to be taught how to manage their

forest, that what they had done traditionally was not the ‘proper’ way of managing the forest, and that their knowledge wasn’t ‘scientific’ but needed to be.

### **Forest Management and Development**

By the mid- to late 1970s, concerns with deforestation and environmental instability had not only become more detailed (as they grew in intensity) but also began to increasingly overlap with other ‘development’ concerns, among the first of which was the ‘basic needs’ development model popular at the time. At the international level a series of conferences and policy statements elucidating the new social role for forestry in the promotion of community development was led by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with support from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) (Gilmour 1989: 29; Arnold 1991: 2). The new focus was to become “forestry for local community development” (FAO 1978). It was also in 1978, that the World Bank issued its influential *Forestry: Sector Policy Paper* which signaled a major shift in its forestry activities away from industrial forestry towards environmental protection and meeting local needs (Arnold 1991: 2). What becomes increasingly apparent is that this new approach to development, referred to as “community forestry,” emerged not out of the forestry sector as might be expected (and as some believe), but rather, is the product of an expansion of the development apparatus into new areas.

In 1975 a 13-day conference was convened in Kathmandu to discuss issues related to forest management in Nepal. Attended by District Forest Officers (DFOs) from throughout the country as well as senior members of the Forest Department and Ministry, the meeting was remarkable in that it lasted a full twenty-three days, rather than the 3 days it was scheduled for. Out of the conference, a working group was formed with the

task of formulating a plan to guide the future development of forestry in Nepal (Gilmour et al. 1989: 95). The result of all this was the National Forestry Plan, 1976; which it was hoped would also redress the neglect shown the forests in the Hills regions (NAFP 1979: 13).

The National Forestry Plan, 1976, is heralded as Nepal's first step in the direction of developing policies to address forestry development in the middle hills, policies that included involvement of the rural populace (Gilmour and Fisher 1991). In recognizing the disastrous effects of the Private Forests Nationalization Act, 1957, one of its objectives was to reverse the negative attitudes and actions that it was believed nationalization had created. The National Forestry Plan identified the conservation, management, and development of forests as requiring "a collective effort of all people in the country" (HMG 1991). While issues related to wildlife management, grazing, and the forest industry were discussed, the government was also keenly aware of the need for improved education and training through the Nepal Forestry Institute, an improved organizational system within the Forest Department, and especially the "use of local labor and the co-operation and participation of the people of Nepal". It was thus hoped that the new Forestry Plan would provide greater flexibility and allow local people more involvement in the control and management of forest resources. This was to be accomplished through a new approach to forest management: "Instead of adopting a blanket approach all over the Kingdom, a suitable forest management system will be adopted for each zone on the basis of its geographical peculiarities as well as social

priority” (emphasis added, NAFP 1979: 16).<sup>33</sup> The Forestry Plan was also quite progressive in that it provided a framework for forest management that allowed for flexibility in drafting management plans that would allow for a consideration of differing local contexts (even though this has not happened to any great extent). According to Bajracharya, it was the first time that a government program combined “people’s participation, collectively and individually, with the government providing the necessary technical and extension services,” and considered the “socio-economic realities of the nation” (1983b: 234).

Following the policy base established by the National Forestry Plan, *Panchayat* Forest, *Panchayat* Protected Forest, and Leasehold Forest Legislation were passed in 1978. These rules were issued as part of the First Amendment of the Forest Act and were intended to involve communities and private interests in the management of forests. It was under this new legislation that the rules and regulations governing the handing over of government forestland - virtually all land not cultivated or otherwise under private ownership - to the control of the *gaun* (village) *panchayat* were specified. These areas were to be operated under an official management plan with the objective of supplying the forest produce needs of the people living in the *Panchayat*. As one community forestry project staff member remarked, at the time, this legislation was envisaged by the government as “giving control to local communities,” whereas “local villagers viewed

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<sup>33</sup> This meant that the three main ‘ecological regions,’ the high mountains, middle hills, and terai forests, were to receive individual attention.

this as a transfer from the central government to local government.... [but] still in government hands, nonetheless.”<sup>34</sup>

*Panchayat* Forests were defined as degraded forest areas - limited to a maximum 125 hectares per community - entrusted to a village *panchayat* for reforestation in the interest of the village community. The government (through foreign-aided projects) was to provide land, seedlings, and technical assistance, with all income from the sale of forest products going directly to the *panchayat*. *Panchayat* Protected Forests were existing forests entrusted to local *panchayats* for protection and proper management. They were limited to 500 hectares in each *panchayat*, and were similar to *Panchayat* Forests except that villages were to receive three-fourths of forest product income. Leasehold Forests varied from 2.5 hectares for individuals to 68 hectares for institutions. All benefits accrued through the afforestation and management of Leasehold Forests was to go to the lessee.

In contrast to previous forest policy, both the National Forestry Plan and the legislation passed in 1978 showed signs of a more progressive approach to forest management. It was understood that this legislation would formally recognize the rights of villagers to manage their own forest resources - with technical assistance (where necessary) being provided by the Forest Department (Gilmour et al. 1989: 27). Although the government recognized the necessity of incorporating local people in forest management, the persistent bias of forest policy remained towards “protection,

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<sup>34</sup> This is one of the earliest examples of the divergence of ideas concerning community forestry policy. That local villagers and bureaucrats had differing views of community forestry is not surprising. This issue becomes highly problematic, as I will discuss in greater detail in a later chapter, when community forestry and donor funded projects make claims of including villagers’ views in the planning of future community forestry policy and practice.

production, and proper utilization,” primarily in accordance with the desire to halt environmental deterioration and ensure that the relationship between forests and ‘development’ remained primarily focused on generating government revenue as a means to bolster the national economy (NAFP 1979: 14-16). Even though it was obvious that proper maintenance and development of forests in Nepal was neither possible nor even practical through government efforts alone, ‘people-oriented’ (Gilmour and Fisher 1991) or ‘community-based’ forest and land-use policies had yet to materialize. More problematic, the rhetoric of ‘people’s involvement’ in forest management, the approach suggested by the National Forestry Plan, was suspiciously similar to the development models of the 1950s and 1960s.

At the heart of forestry policy was the assumption that simply increasing the physical supply of forest products would suffice. The manner in which this was to be accomplished still relied on a plantation approach, where villagers were expected to restock designated areas and then reap the benefits through the sale of timber products. Within the designated areas, villagers were restricted from clearing, cultivating, or settling in the forests. In addition to a lack of support for fostering local initiatives and participation, villagers still lacked authority in making decisions regarding the management and use of their forests. Moreover, the social and political problems encountered in diverse regions in which projects were being carried out were being ignored. While it appeared as though the government was on the right path, the results were nevertheless disappointing as the area of forest actually handed over had only been a small fraction of the forest area available. Although a variety of factors were identified for the disappointing results, a report by HMG cites a major reason being the “impractical

nature of the *Panchayat* Forest and *Panchayat* Protected Forest Rules which failed to create an environment for the full participation of all users” (1991: 4).

### **Decentralization and Forest Management**

The issue of people’s ‘participation,’ of ensuring their involvement, along with ideas about ‘empowerment,’ ‘control,’ and ‘decentralization’ began to emerge and gain in importance as a new set of strategies to manage forests began to take shape under the aegis of community forestry. While under the National Forestry Plan forests were “considered as social property” (NAFP 1979: 22), it was not until the passage of the Decentralization Act 1982 that villagers were finally legally empowered to control the management of forests. According to the act, village *panchayats* were empowered

to form people’s consumers committees [‘users groups’] to use any specific forest area for the purpose of forest conservation and through it, conduct such tasks as afforestation, and forest conservation and management on a sustained basis. (Regmi 1984: 403, cited in Gilmour and Fisher 1991:14.)

By introducing the concept of ‘user groups’ (*upabhokta samuha*) the government sought to ensure the ‘participation’ of the local population in local resource management activities (HMG 1992: 5). Responsibility for organizing these user groups and implementing development activities was given to the local village *panchayat*.<sup>35</sup> The main objective was “to devolve the authority for most forest operations and management to the village *panchayat* - and even lower levels” (Gilmour et al 1989: 27).

The momentum gained during the 1970s and especially the 1980s as the government moved in the direction of maximizing community control culminated in the

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<sup>35</sup> The concept of Forest User Group was eventually adopted as part of the amendment to the *Panchayat* Forest and *Panchayat* Protected Forest 1988, although the locus of authority remained the village *panchayats* (HMG 1992: 5).

preparation of the Forestry Legislation Reform and the Forestry Sector Policy Statement (Master Plan) 1989. Both USAID and the World Bank were exceptionally influential in its preparation and direction. The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (MPFS) institutionalized the ‘program approach’ to guide forestry development by introducing six major Forestry Sector Programs - the largest of which is the Community and Private Forestry Program (HMG 1992: 6).<sup>36</sup> The central focus of the Master Plan is for forest resources to be managed through the active ‘participation’ of individuals and communities to meet their needs. Underlying this new legislation is the basic premise that the rights to legally manage a forest area are what are most important, regardless of ownership rights (HMG 1992: 5). It stresses ‘people’s participation’ in forest management, and provides the legal and organizational framework needed to increase the contributions of communities to forestry development. The basic strategy of the Master Plan is phased handing over of all accessible hill forest areas to communities to the extent that they are able and willing to manage them, based on the formulation and implementation of simple “operational plans” – formal documents that specify the various rules and regulations that must be adhered to in the management and use of community forests (HMG 1992: 6). Additionally, the Master Plan made provisions for the retraining of all Ministry of Forests and Environment (MFE) Staff for their new role as “advisors and extension workers.” It was naively believed that the authority held by foresters for decades could be erased with the sweep of a pen.

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<sup>36</sup> It is estimated that investment in community forestry would amount to 47 percent of total forestry sector investment over the next two decades (Gilmour and Fisher 1991: 15).



The government of Nepal's most recent legislation giving priority to community forestry arrived with the passing of the Forest Act (1993). Said to represent a significant change in Nepal's forestry legislation, the Forest Act incorporated many of the changes proposed in the Master Plan. In contrast to previous legislation, which maintained control of almost all forest land by the government, this new legislation was designed for the purpose of transferring a major proportion of responsibility for forest management and use to local forest user groups, while retaining under government management only those areas deemed to have national value for timber production or environmental protection (Pardo 1993: 23). It needs to be stressed, however, that even under the 1993 Forest Act ownership of community forestland remains with the government; user groups are only given authority to manage and use the forest resources on the land. Thus, what is being 'handed over' is "only a form of resource stewardship and, with it, certain rights of access and utilization. The actual ownership of the land, trees and associated resources, remains with His Majesty's Government" (Messerschmidt 1994: 36). I will revisit this issue in the next chapter, since it is one area of leverage behind the state's continued control over forests.

### **"Community Forestry" Takes Shape in Nepal**

Community forestry, as currently defined by forestry legislation and policy in Nepal, refers to the forest management strategy whereby forests are protected, managed, and utilized by local forest users. Its main emphasis circulates around the notion of 'participation.' Local people, considered the "actual users of the forest" are called upon to 'participate' in "planning, implementing and decision making in all aspects of forest management; development, production, protection and use" (HMG 1992: 8). The notions

of ‘participation’ and ‘self-reliance’ underpin the transfer of responsibility to local forest users. As the Master Plan states, the goal is “to encourage communities to be increasingly more self-reliant. The challenge of community forestry is indeed to mobilize the vast manpower and other resources of rural communities for forest development and management to meet their own needs” (MPFSN 1988: 145; quoted in Burch and Messerschmidt 1990).

Table 4.1. National Statistics on the Hand-Over of Community Forests\*

	2001
Total Land Area	4 270 000
Percentage in Forest <sup>†</sup>	29 %
Potential CF Area (ha.)	3,561,600
Forest Area Handed Over (ha.)	747 909
No. of CFUGs	9874

Sources: \*Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal (2001)

<sup>†</sup>Statistics for total forest area, only, is for 1999, HMGN/Department of Forest Research and Survey (1999)

Among the reasons given for the transformation of the government’s orientation, is the realization that rural communities depend on the forests for the supply of fodder, fuelwood, and other forest products. For effective forest management to become a reality, the government realized that the Community Forestry Program, in order to be ‘community-based,’ must involve community members in the management process. In effect, one of the aims in this new perspective is to decentralize forest management, to make it more of a “grass roots” system rather than a “top-down” one. Added to this was the realization that since the forests of Nepal are often fragmented into small patches, coupled with the difficulty in accessing many areas throughout the middle hills, effective

management and protection by Forest Department staff was a virtual impossibility with the present centralized bureaucratic structure. In this sense, encouraging ‘people’s participation’ was very much about a transfer of the responsibility from the government onto the shoulders of local community user groups.

Table 4.2. Community Forestry results in the NUKCFP western area as of 1999/2000

	Districts	Myagdi	Baglung	Parbat
Total Forest Area (ha.)		84, 452	n/a	n/a
Potential CF Area (ha.)		61,306 (73%)	79,500	19,000
Forest Area Handed Over (ha.) (% of Potential CF)		15, 000 (25.5%)	7, 000 (8.8%)	5, 000 (26.4%)
No. of CFUGs in the District		202	221	217
No. of Households included		23,000	26, 000	23,000

Source: NUKCFP statistics 1999/2000

There are a series of logistical constraints, or as the Forest Department recognizes them, ‘bottlenecks to implementation,’ that have hindered the “hand-over of control” to communities. The total potential amount of land said to be available for community forest amounts to some 3.56 million ha., which is equivalent to 59% of all forested land in Nepal (Department of Forest Research and Survey 1999). By 1992, however, the area that had been established as community forests was equal to only 99,500 ha, or 2.8% of the potential land available. By 2000, there were approximately 9874 recognized FUG's legally managing 747, 909 ha of forested land, or approximately 21% of the forested land in Nepal (HMG 2001; Department of Forest Research and Survey 1999). While this

represents a significant growth in ‘hand-over’ of forests, there remains a considerable amount of work ahead before all potential community forests are ‘handed-over.’

### **Creating New Social Institutions**

The advent of community forestry with its focus on handing over forested land to the users has required the creation of institutional entities, called forest user groups (FUGs). According to community forestry legislation, a forest user group possesses the following characteristics:

1. The Forest User Group is a legal entity and autonomous body
2. It protects and manages the forest and can sell forest products without tax liability. The government does not take any share from the FUG's earnings
3. It makes its own annual plan to manage forest and can amend it to address administrative problems
4. It can acquire, use, sell and transfer movable and immovable properties.
5. It decides how to punish a member who violates the working plan
6. It has a fund of its own, can get grants from the government and other sources. However, it is mandatory for the FUGs to spend at least 25 percent of the funds on forestry development. The rest can be spent on other community activities.

In order to ‘encourage’ “people’s participation” in forest management, a major part of the Community Forestry Program has involved the construction of the legal and organizational framework needed to increase and strengthen the contributions of local communities for sustainable forestry development. The implications of this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

### **The Forester in Community Forestry**

Community Forestry, as defined by Nepal’s approach, is lauded as a significant shift in the forest management. In particular, this shift has been from the ‘traditional forest management’ system (also referred to as ‘tree-centered’ forestry, or the Forestry

Model), in which the goal is to protect, preserve, and/or increase the physical stand of the forest, to a system in which the actual users are given control (and varying amounts of guidance) to manage “their” forests; also known as a ‘people-centered’ approach (Gilmour et al. 1989; Gilmour & Fisher 1991). As part of the ‘forestry model’ that prevailed for most of Nepal’s history of forest management, the control and power was always situated in the hands of professional foresters; justified by the belief that only the forestry profession has the knowledge sufficient to manage the forests effectively. Gilmour and Fisher (1991) contend that the community forestry approach, in contrast, involves putting local people who use the forests at the center of the management effort. They contend that the objective of community forestry is now less about maintaining trees (or biophysically-oriented) than it is aimed at improving the situation of the poor and landless, based on the belief that this will in turn mean better use and overall protection - and sustainability - of the forests. Nevertheless, such views continue to form a large part of the conventional thinking about community forestry.

At the same time, many of the new aims woven into community forestry are believed to have had a significant impact on the forester. By giving the local user groups full control over their own forest management, it is claimed that forest officials and field staff have essentially had their previous position of power and authority revoked. Similarly, the rhetoric surrounding indigenous systems of forest management, the ability of indigenous systems to effectively manage forests in a locally equitable manner, would suggest that foresters have also had their role as ‘expert’ revoked. And yet, this isn’t the view held by most of the villagers whom I interviewed, who still believe that they need to turn to and require the knowledge that forest department staff possess. Even the idea of

the ‘forester as extension agent’ doesn’t undermine their role as ‘expert,’ it only hides their authority under the cloak of ‘assistance.’ And for the forester this adds to their workload, as they are now required to take on the role of consultants as well as extension agents providing guidance and support.

This is supposed to have led to an overhaul in the way foresters are trained in Nepal. Now it is argued that foresters need not only to be proficient in good silviculture practices, they also need to be able to advise, negotiate, monitor and revise management plans “under the authority of the local user group” (Burch and Messerschmidt 1990; Metz 1991). Forest staff are having to supplement their biophysical or technical forestry skills with the appropriate social science program to provide a sufficient foundation from which they will be able to work effectively with local peoples (Burch and Messerschmidt 1990). Some of these new needs are meant to be accomplished through a revised curriculum at the Institute of Forestry, where nearly all of Nepal’s forest staff is trained. The Institute’s Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) Program in forestry is a 4-year program. However, of the 68 courses that are offered as part of the program, only three ‘social’ or ‘community’-related courses are offered. During their first year of study, students must take one social science course, ‘Social Science for Forestry’ (what is basically an introductory anthropology/sociology course). During their third year students take a “Social Forestry” course, and in the fourth year, “Community Forestry II” is offered as an elective. Hardly the curriculum to provide the basis for foresters ‘new role’.

It has been pointed out that the reluctance or inability of forest officials and field staff to fully transfer their authority represents a major hindrance to effective community forestry management (Gilmour & Fisher 1991; Metz 1991; HMG 1991; Baral & Lamsal

1991). Burch and Messerschmidt (1990) argue that a large part of this problem stems from the training and overall attitudes of forest staff which needs to be much more closely aligned with the goals and objectives of the Community Forestry Program. Gronow (1987) found that field staff often lacked the necessary attitudes and skills required to successfully implement Community Forestry. Rangers were either unaware of Community Forestry legislation, had no training in forestry extension, were often from the Terai lowlands and hence knew little about the forests of the hills (not to mention viewed their placement in the hills and away from home as a form of punishment), and/or were unable or unwilling to accept that real responsibility for developing forest management must be handed over (Gronow 1987). And Fisher (1989) attributes part of the problem to be due to the 'culture' of foresters and the "institutional incompatibility" between foresters and villagers. These accounts of the problem are suspiciously similar to the critiques of Nepal's more general failure to 'develop' or achieve 'decentralization,' the problems being social or cultural rather than technical or legislative.

### **Community Forestry as Development Project**

The weaving together of forest management, afforestation efforts, and various environmental concerns with rural and community development has recently had the effect of recasting 'community forestry' within an increasingly 'development'-based discourse. Community forestry has come to be envisaged as a means to promote income generating activities and increase job opportunities, ensure people's rights to forest resources and equitable gender participation, improved benefit sharing, better understanding and application of indigenous knowledge, and updating of technical skills

in a wider range of management practices relevant to community forestry. Shrestha's comments, quoted previously, bear repeating (2001: 62):

The community forestry movement in Nepal carries hope for sustaining democracy and alleviating poverty through sustainable resource management.... So community forestry is not just the regeneration of forests and the supply of forestry products to meet the needs of local users, important as this may be. It is also a process and campaign that supports democratic principles by allowing local users to make decisions by consensus. Thus it has become a school to practice democracy, gender balance, equity, social justice, respect for diversity, good governance, as well as sustainable resource management.

In this passage, we see how the environmental imperatives of the 1970s and 1980s, though not entirely replaced, have been overwhelmed by the 'development' imperatives that have more recently taken center stage.

Behind the incorporation of these other 'development' objectives, is the increasing role played by several bi-laterally funded 'community forestry projects' and other donors in expanding community forestry as a 'development' endeavor. The implementation of community forestry, according to Gilmour and Fisher, is heavily target driven:

The targets arise both from pressures within the Forest Department and from the institutional requirements of the funding agencies. Community forestry in the hills is being implemented through the normal structure of the Forest Department. However, this is being facilitated by various aid agencies in most districts. These range in size from small bilateral projects covering one or two districts to the largest – the Community Forestry Development Project – which is providing technical assistance and financial support, by way of loans from the World Bank, in 35 hill districts. Most of the funding agencies tend to require the setting of physical targets, largely for reasons of financial accountability and as an aid to future monitoring. The need to set targets has a corollary – the tendency to look for 'national guidelines for implementation.' The World Bank, because of the sheer size of its loan, tends to be a dominant influence in the development of policy and procedures. This creates substantial tension, not least because many of the ideas which find their way into policy have more to do with the political ideology and expectations of the World Bank, than the realities of life in a Nepali



hill village... many bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, each of which has its own institutional requirements, based on bureaucratic priorities or the policies of the donor governments (1991: 115-6).

Since the initiation of the Community Forestry Program, in 1978, the international donor community has provided more than \$62 million worth of financial and technical support for the program (Table 4.3). As of 1999 there were 68 different international agencies supporting Nepal's forestry program, with more than half with a community forestry component (Chapagain et al. 1999). Of the many on-going donor-supported community forestry projects, the major donors providing support include: the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); Australian Aid (AusAid); the German Development Agency (GTZ); the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); United States Agency for International Development (USAID); the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). These donor-funded projects cover more than 60 districts throughout Nepal. Perhaps more importantly, these community forestry projects have, in their own ways, been instrumental in shaping policies, redefining in important ways what 'community forestry' is, its objectives, how it is to be implemented, and the criteria used to judge the success of the program.<sup>37</sup> Out of the total development budget allocated to the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation for the fiscal year 1997-98, donors funded

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<sup>37</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter, and this dissertation as a whole, to cover in detail each of these many donor-supported community forestry projects. Suffice it to say that while each project has its own individual emphases and approach to implementation, primarily derived from the donor's priorities, all of these projects are exceedingly similar in terms of the degree to which they have recently given greater priority to social-institutional issues as opposed to the more technical concerns associated with growing trees.

Table 4.3: List of Major Donor-Supported Community forestry Projects in Nepal

Donor	CF Project	Description of Project	Amount of Financial Support	Duration of Project
World Bank and UNDP	Hill Community Forestry Development Project, Phase III			July 1990-June 1999
DANIDA	Community Forestry Training Project	Supported the related training activities, including the establishment of 5 Regional Training Centers (RTCs)	US\$ 11 M	1989-1998
	Natural Resource Management Sector Assistance Program (NARMSAP): Community and Private Forestry Component (CPFC) and Tree Improvement and Silviculture Component (TISC);		US\$ 10 M.	1998-2003
	Also under NARMSAP; Community Forestry Field Implementation Component (CFFIC)	Supporting implementation of the community forestry program in 38 hill districts	US\$ 6 M	1999 - 2003
FAO	Hill Leasehold Forestry and Forage Project, phase II		US\$ 2.9 M	1997-2001
AusAid	Nepal-Australia Community Resource Management Project	Provides support in 2 hill districts	US\$ 6.2 M	1997-2002
GTZ	Churia Forest Development project	Provides support in 3 Terai districts	US\$ 4.2 M	1998-2001
SDC	Nepal-Swiss Community Forestry Project, Phase III	Provides support in 3 hill districts	US\$ 2.7 M	1996-2000
USAID	Environment and Forest Enterprise Activity (EFEA), implemented by CARE	Supports 6 hill districts and 2 terai districts, and includes forestry, soil conservation, and national parks	US \$ 8.8 M	1996-2002
DFID	Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project	Supports community forestry in 7 hill districts <sup>38</sup>	US\$ 11 M	1993-2000

<sup>38</sup> As I concluded my fieldwork in Nepal in May, 2000, the NUKCFP was in the process of expanding its project into another district in Far-Western Nepal.

approximately 45 percent. Not surprisingly, the government's commitment to “‘decentralization’ and ‘participation’ have become the key preconditions for donor support” (Chapagain et al. 1999: 26).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, ‘decentralization’ and ‘participation’ have come to serve not only as the means through which community forestry is to be implemented, but are also ends for the program, even emblematic of the program.

The Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project (NUKCFP) (which is operating in the district in which Manohar, my village field-site is located) is, for several reasons, considered one of the more successful projects assisting in the implementation of community forestry in Nepal. This project illustrates quite well the premium placed on the social-institutional (i.e., ‘democracy’-related) set of practices that have now come to dominate community forestry projects. The overarching goal of the project is to improve the living conditions of the villagers in the seven districts in which the project is operating, with the purpose to increase the effectiveness of the forest users groups in managing community forests in an equitable and sustainable basis. According to the project's documents, the main objectives and activities include:

- Supporting an independent and equitable decision making capacity in all forest users groups
- Foster an equitable benefit distribution to all users (e.g., literate and non-literate; rich and poor; male and female; higher and lower caste, etc.) resulting from project activities.
- Supporting the development of forest users group's capacity to organize themselves and strengthen their ability to carry out their own planning, implementing, and reporting activities

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<sup>39</sup> Community forestry policy and legislation, as well as individual projects have had to respond to the influences wrought by donors, incorporating donor priorities in order to maintain their funding. For example, one of the top-level staff of the NUKCFP project expressed his concerns about new donor policy directions, which require all DfID-funded projects were to redefine themselves according to addressing ‘poverty elimination.’

- Supporting the building of the capacity of local government and non-government organizations in order to provide support services to forest users groups.

The goal of institutional ‘capacity building,’ the area of the third point above, is further broken down into institutional strengthening of forest users groups, ‘self-monitoring,’ and developing a ‘record keeping system’. These objectives, in various guises, are also written into the project plans of nearly all the other community forestry projects funded by the US, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, as well as the FAO and the World Bank (Table 4.3.). That these objectives – the attempts to promote a particular set of institutional practices at the local level – have become the primary focus of community forestry projects, overshadowing environmental- or tree growing-related issues, testifies to the degree to which community forestry has shifted away from being considered a *forest* management program to a *development* program in the forestry sector. The consequences of this shift to an emphasis on transforming institutional practices is the subject of the following chapter.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have attempted to highlight several of the important objectives, legislation, and issues that have come to define community forestry as variably envisaged in Nepal over the past several decades. Forest management in Nepal has certainly experienced a profound transformation in its purpose and approach. One of the more important changes in legislation revolves around the locus of authority for management. Whereas the staff of the Department of Forests were once charged with policing forests, protecting trees from local villagers, they are now involved in facilitating the transference of authority and responsibility for management to villagers. Perhaps more significant has

been the shift away from the technical concerns of growing trees and towards the reconfiguration of legislation that concentrates on several social and institutional practices associated with the management of forests and the role forests can play in serving broader ‘development’-oriented objectives at the local level. It is in this respect that the several donor-funded community forestry projects have been most influential in reshaping the program. Overall, my aim in this chapter has been to illustrate that what has come to distinguish community forestry at the end of the 1990s is its convergence with broader ‘development’ imperatives as they have emerged in Nepal, particularly those associated with ‘democracy’, arguably the most salient term associated with politics and development in Nepal. It is not surprising then that for many villagers, as well as forestry and project staff, community forestry is “for the people, of the people, and by the people.” The effects of the newly formed linkages between community forestry, its practices, and politics are problematized in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### COMMUNITY FORESTRY, THE STATE, AND (DE-)CENTRALIZATION

*The political valence of decentralization cannot be assumed. Each act of decentralization must be scrutinized to understand its implications.*

Jesse Ribot (1999: 27)

*People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.*

Michel Foucault (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 187)

#### **Interrogating Community-based Programs**

Community-based programs have arisen to promote a variety of objectives and challenge a number of still dominant notions (Li 1996: 504): the tragedy of the commons thesis (Hardin 1968; Feeney et al. 1990; Berkes & Farvar 1989; Bromley 1992); the ignorance of peasants (Korten 1986; Warren et al. 1995); the managerial capacity (Little et al 1987; Gilmour & Fisher 1991), motives and wisdom of government (Kothari & Parajuli 1993; Peet & Watts 1996), and; the superiority of western science and management (Vivian 1992; Hobart 1993). Donor agencies and national governments alike have invested heavily to promote community-based resource management as a means to increase access to resources, alleviate poverty and improve livelihood security, empower disadvantaged groups (i.e., as a development program), and as a means to protect, conserve and sustainably manage and use a wide array of resources, including forests, rivers and watersheds, wildlife, and marine resources (i.e., as an environmental program). Similarly, community-based resource management programs have also

become closely aligned with social justice and grassroots environmental movements (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Kothari & Parajuli 1993; Peet & Watts 1996). The proliferation of studies documenting the capacity and adaptability of traditional and/or indigenous resource management systems (Gadgil et al., 1993; Agrawal 1995; Dewalt 1994; Warren et al 1995; Western et al 1994; Gilmour & Fisher 1991; Messerschmidt 1995a) has done much to support the acceptance of community-based approaches to resource management.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming advocacy for community-based resource management programs the world over, such programs have not been immune to debate or critical reappraisal (Brosius, et al. 1998). Not unlike the poststructural critiques directed at 'development,' a number of scholars and other variably positioned advocates have begun to interrogate the policies and practices associated with 'community-based' programs and related (grassroots) environmental movements. Among the several contested issues being debated is the relationship between environmental conservation, degradation, and sustainable development, on the one hand, and on the other, concerns with social justice, rural poverty, indigenous rights, and the distribution and exercise of authority (Ghai & Vivian 1992; Guha 1990; Peet & Watts 1996). In addition to the objective of providing an effective means of promoting conservation and sustainable development, community-based programs are often envisaged as a means to promote a new form of political agency (via local level empowerment or 'decentralization'), which may or may not bring about a fundamental shift in the distribution and exercise of authority (Zerner 1994; Lipschutz & Conca 1993; Lipschutz and Mayer 1996; Kuehls 1996). In the last decade as a number of scholars have begun to question the extent to

which attempts to administer a variety of environmental schemes is reflective of local concerns and/or does not merely strengthen the established political and economic control of local elite and/or the central government (Peluso 1992, 1993; Hitchcock 1995; Ribot 1997, 1999; Schroeder 1999), or even create a new space for political control (DuBois 1991; Leftwich 1994; Darier 1996, 1999; Luke 1999) or social conflict (Scott 1985; Guha 1990; Ferguson 1990; Rangan 1996; Escobar 1995; Peluso 1992). This has led a number of scholars and advocates to problematize ‘development’ and ‘environmental’ discourses as they impinge on national policies (Ferguson 1990; Lynch and Talbott 1995) and local practices ‘on the ground’ (Moore 1996, 1998; Rocheleau 1995; Rocheleau et al 1996; Rocheleau and Ross 1995; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Leach et al. 1997), as well as how they figure in reshaping the social and political relations between the state and society (Peluso 1993; Hitchcock 1995; Schroeder 1999; Ribot 1999; Ferguson 2001; Peters 2001).

Like so many other ‘community-based’ programs that have emerged in other parts of the world, community forestry in Nepal, as was discussed in Chapter 4, is also an incredibly ambitious program. Policy makers, bi-lateral donors, environmentalists, scholars, and local ‘communities’ laud it as a means to achieve a wide spectrum of objectives. Income generation, poverty alleviation, women’s empowerment, community development, sustainable livelihoods, not to mention of course, forest protection, conservation, and regeneration, are all refractions of community forestry as *development* program. Lately, these objectives have been surpassed by the meteoric rise of ‘decentralization’ and ‘democracy,’ and the ways in which these new terms have become aligned with the notions associated with the ‘good governance’ agenda; ‘participation,’



‘empowerment,’ and most notably, the privileging of ‘institutional capacity building’ now lie at the center of what is ostensibly a scheme to introduce an unprecedented degree of political and social modernization throughout Nepal. The privileging of ‘institutional capacity building’ – record-keeping, monitoring, transparency, accountability – especially displays the degree to which a Western conceptualization of (bureaucratic and democratic) modernization has come to constitute both the basis of development and the contours of the state.

The aim of this chapter, to adapt Pigg’s (1992) admonition, is not to measure the extent of the benefits of community forestry, the criteria used to determine what is or is not beneficial, nor ask the kinds of questions that the government, the Department of Forests, or development/community forestry projects themselves would ask. Rather, this chapter explores the extent to which community forestry is what it claims to be; a decentralization program that transfers authority and control from the state to local communities. ‘Decentralization’ and ‘democracy’ are deemed more than just objectives to be pursued, distinguished as they are also for enabling the many material and social aims mentioned above. As I have discussed in previous chapters, despite the role accorded the ‘democratic revolution’ of 1990, the recent legislative endeavors of the Forest Act of 1993 and Forest Regulations 1995, or even the Decentralization Act, 1993, (recognized as a milestone in the mobilization of local communities for local resource management) ‘decentralization’ has long been an issue woven into political and development concerns. Nevertheless, decentralization serves as the guiding principle for community forestry, as it does for all ‘community-based’ programs. This chapter poses several questions surrounding the process of implementing community forestry, the legal

strategies involved, and the consequences of new regulatory practices (e.g., record-keeping, monitoring, planning, etc.) that are required of local communities

The previous three chapters (on the growth of the administration, its relationship with the ‘development’ apparatus, and the history of community forestry) all reveal how the administrative apparatus of the government has become increasingly unified, centralized, and rationalized over the past five decades. As we have also seen, these processes have been limited in several respects; incompleteness of the bureaucratic system, local elites able to wield control and manipulate policies and programs at the local level, as well as other ‘cultural’ explanations (corruption, feudalism, fatalistic beliefs, etc.). These chapters have also demonstrated that the processes of state expansion were heavily supported and influenced by a large, diverse, and powerful set of development institutions, illustrating the extent to which “the international is always present in domestic politics” (Abrahamsen 2000: xi).

Chapter 4, in particular, described in detail the content and transformation of forest policy in Nepal, its shift from state-centered, protectionist policies, initially motivated by revenue extraction and later by the scenarios of environmental degradation and crisis, to a community-based approach. What has yet to be examined are the specific practices associated with community forestry; the constellation of strategies, procedures, regulations, and practices associated with ‘decentralization’ of management control to local forest user groups. This chapter begins with an examination of some of the ways in which centralization and expanding state control have been theorized by a number of important writers. Drawing on this literature, I will argue that the practices associated with community forestry (and their connection with what constitutes ‘institutional

capacity building,’ ‘decentralization,’ and ‘democratization’) are providing a means by which the state is able to expand its control over resources and its population, despite the rhetoric of ‘decentralization’. This argument will come alive as the discussion shifts to exploring the practices of community forestry as implemented by the Department of Forests, and combined with the role and activities of community forestry projects.

### **Theorizing the State, Power, and ‘Governmentality’**

*‘Governmentality’:... The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.*

Michel Foucault (1991: 102)

Much of conventional (i.e., Western) political theory, drawing heavily on such writers as John Locke, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, and Max Weber, has tended to approach the subject of the ‘modern state’ through three key terms: ‘sovereignty,’ ‘territory’ and ‘government’.<sup>40</sup> For Rousseau, who was very much concerned with the legitimacy of the state, treated sovereignty and government, though interdependent, as distinguished from one another; ‘sovereignty’ is about authority and law, whereas ‘government’ is about (political) economy – the “political body’s relationship to its population and territory” (Kuehls 1996: 58). Using such concepts as nature, contract and general will, Rousseau’s notion of government, according to Foucault, “allows room for both a juridical principle of sovereignty and for the elements through which an art of government can be defined and characterized” (1991: 101). Weber, who is perhaps better known for his writings on

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<sup>40</sup> Rousseau and Weber, as well as Joseph Schumpeter, have also been prominent figures in terms of theorizing ‘democracy’. For Weber, democracy is primarily a means of producing an effective political leadership in conditions of a modern bureaucratic society.

the modern bureaucracy, was also concerned with identifying the distinctive features of the modern state, which he defined as a type of 'political community' possessing a monopoly on the 'legitimate' use of force in addition to its association with a 'territory' (Gledhill 2000: 11; Weber 1978). However, consider also Weber's bureaucratic ideal-type, distinguished by: vocational specialization of salaried, full-time officials; the separation of officials from ownership of the means of administration; its rational-legal order of legitimation; and, highly relevant for our discussion here, the existence of written rules, and hierarchy of offices in a pyramid of centralized authority (1978). When brought together, forming the ideal, modern bureaucratic state, we see a semblance of the standard sought in state formation in Nepal since unification in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but especially from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

In exploring the emergence of the 'modern state' in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, several scholars have extended the ideas of Rousseau, Weber and others to theorize the way(s) in which the 'modern state' differs from its predecessors in terms of its 'penetration' of everyday life (Foucault 1979, 1980, 1991; Giddens 1979, 1984, 1985, 1990; Hall 1985; Mann 1986). Giddens (1985), one of the more prominent social theorist for example, contrasted the emerging governmental apparatus of the early sixteenth century European state with that of the pre-modern, or 'traditional,' yet highly centralized bureaucracy of Imperial China. The emerging European state, Giddens argues, affected the day to day lives of those it claimed to rule to a far greater degree than that of pre-modern imperial governments. The reason, according to Giddens, was that although traditional states may have claimed to be 'masters of all they surveyed,' they lacked the administrative, communicative and military infrastructures necessary to make

this claim a reality (Gledhill 2000: 15). As we have discussed previously, in the case of Nepal's process of state formation since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the problem of government has been creating a 'modern' administrative state in the face of geographic, social and fiscal constraints, constraints that have continued to stymie the state's attempts to centralize its control. The main argument in this chapter is to demonstrate how community forestry, and the set of practices associated with it, is extending the reach of the state beyond what it has previously experienced. That this is occurring while the state is now claiming to administer legislation to foster decentralization only serves to highlight the unintended consequences and contradictory nature of such legislation and attempts. In an effort to explore this process, Foucault's writings on 'governmentality,' 'knowledge/power,' 'disciplinary power,' and 'bio-power' prove especially useful.

Michel Foucault in drawing upon the ideas of Rousseau, Weber, and others, has elaborated on the details of state power as exercised through the 'art of government,' or 'governmentality'. For Foucault, 'governmentality' describes a new form of political power that emerged in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The significance of Foucault's writings about the general process of the emergence of the administrative state is that the characteristics of the 'territory' and the 'population' are not considered "mere variables" in the overall problematic of state politics (1991: 93), as they are in traditional political theory – in the case of Rousseau and his contemporaries, for example. Rather, the 'problem of government' focuses on these variables, such that the state becomes concerned with the welfare and character of the population, not just its adherence to the law (Kuehls 1996: 65). What had previously been confined to the realm of the family (providing for the common welfare of the various individuals' economic and moral

concerns) moved to become a problem of politics at the level of the state.<sup>41</sup> An entire range of problems entered the domain of the ‘art of government,’ writes Foucault; “wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.... [and including] customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking” (1991: 93). Demonstrating the influences of Rousseau, Weber and Marx, Foucault applies ‘governmentality’ to what he saw as the “introduction of economy into political practice.... To govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behavior of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods” (1991: 92). There are similarities here with Weber’s bureaucracy (and connections to Marx), but Foucault extends his analysis with his use of ‘governmentality’.

The ‘art of government,’ for Foucault, does not only refer to the manner in which the state rules over its population, but includes ‘biopower’ (‘biopolitics’ or ‘body politics’); the ways in which individuals conduct themselves, the relationships they have with their own bodies and with the bodies of others. In terms of this conduct, biopower refers to the technologies, knowledges, discourses, politics and practices used to bring about the production and management of a state’s human resources. Biopower analyzes, regulates, controls, explains and defines the human subject, its body and behavior. The

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<sup>41</sup> This is an interesting gendered analogy Foucault employs. Although Foucault has been influential for feminist theorists – though mostly as a result of criticism of his work – the patriarchal similarities between the analogy as applied to the state foreshadow the gendered inequality witnessed in both the government and community forestry in Nepal. Gender, and other, inequalities in community forestry will be explored further in Chapters 5-7.

notion of ‘governmentality’ involves a greater emphasis on the state’s ability to manage its resources (including its population) economically and efficiently, and a concomitant increase in state intervention in the lives of its citizens. According to Foucault, there have been two major consequences of this change. The first is that citizens are both ‘regulated’ by the state and its institutions and discourses, and educated to monitor and regulate their own behavior. The second is the emergence of an understanding, on the part of citizens, of the need to ‘negotiate’ those forces of ‘subject regulation’ through a process of ‘self-governing’ and ‘self-discipline’.

In order to fully appreciate the application of ‘governmentality’ to community forestry’s role in the emergence of the modern state, we need to consider in greater detail its three overlapping components: first, a centralization around the government (army, education, governmental ministries and departments, justice, etc.); second, an intensification of the effects of power at the levels of both the entire population and of individuals; and, third, the emergence of new forms of knowledge useful for the implementation of the centralization/intensification elements (Darier 1996: 587-8). According to Foucault, governmentality is derived from the new mechanism of ‘disciplinary power’; it involves “the production of an important phenomenon, the emergence, or rather the invention, of a new mechanism of power possessed of highly specific procedural techniques, completely novel instruments, quite different apparatuses” (Foucault 1980: 104). These three components of ‘governmentality’ and their role in producing disciplined subjects are at work in the processes and regulatory practices associated with community forestry in Nepal (and quite possibly in other community-based resource management programs undergoing similar processes). As

user groups are constructed and recognized (by the state) as legitimate managers of community forests they are charged with adhering to a new regulatory regime which involves reshaping their relations with the state through the management of forests.

The first component of ‘governmentality’ is certainly the least controversial. Political and policy studies usually examine this dimension of state-making. This first step in fostering the centralization of state control essentially entails the expansion of the administrative state through the proliferation of bureaucratic agencies (e.g., the various state ministries and departments charged with overseeing such sectors as forestry, health, education, law, military, etc.). The recent writings of Vandergeest and Peluso on forestry in Thailand (1995), Sivaramakrishnan on Indian colonial forest policy (1995, 1996, 1998, 1999), and Scott (1998) on the growth of the modern state, each in various ways, describe the increasing centralization of “institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics” around the state (Foucault 1991: 102) that lead to greater control and authority by the state over people and resources. This expansion of the state apparatus, as has increasingly proceeded in Nepal in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (as discussed in Chapter 2), is not enough, however, to ensure a thorough basis for ‘governmental’ power.

The intensification of the effects of power, the second component of governmentality, entails a shift away from conventional notions of power as repressive to a conceptualization that recognizes power’s *productive* nature, its ability to *produce* “domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault 1979; 1980), and to shift away from ‘reality’ or ‘what is,’ to *how* subjects are formed within discourses – such as ‘development’ and ‘community forestry’. The state, a social class, and



political/economic elite are often identified as the central locus of power - with the ability to censor, to exclude, to mask, to conceal, to say 'no,' are examples of such repressive, negative conceptualizations of power (Darier 1996). Power as 'positive' or 'productive' suggests that there is not a "control center," but rather a "field of power" in which "control, and self-control, of the population [and resources] is thought to be achievable by the standardization of individual and collective conducts through the normalization of individual and collective subjectivity" (Darier 1996: 588). Mobilization of the local population, for instance in the form of the local community forest users group, is a kind of normalization of the population, and as we will see, is attempting to transform them into disciplined environmental/development subjects. Moreover, the 'disciplinary power' of the state is actually embraced by members of forest user groups as they regulate their own forest activities – in order to receive control of their community forests - in ways that must be approved by the Department of Forests.

The third component of 'governmentality' is the "emergence of 'scientific' knowledge, arising from this new modern political power, which in turn actively contributes to the proliferation of new technologies for subjectification of the population" (Darier 1996: 588). For Foucault 'knowledge' is not the objective and politically detached study of 'reality,' but rather the objects of scientific knowledge are intimately intertwined with existing power relations: power "produces reality," it "produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" in which subjects are constituted and simultaneously made subject to power. "Power and knowledge directly imply one another.... There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time

power relations” (Foucault 1984, cited in Rabinow 1984: 337). Thus the unity given to ‘power/knowledge’ by Foucault.

### **Other Accounts of State Power and Centralization of Control**

In recent years a number of writers have begun to apply Foucault’s notions of discourse, knowledge/power, subjectivity, ‘disciplinary power,’ and ‘governmentality’ to the emergence of ‘development’ (Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1985, 1988; 1995; Sachs 1992, Crush 1995) and even more recently to environmental policy (DuBois 1991; Luke 1995, 1999; Darier 1996, 1999; Eder 1996; Rutherford 1994, 1999). Several authors, many of them advocates of community-based programs, have also begun to examine decentralization policies more closely; Pokharel (1998) and Chapagain et al. (1999) in Nepal, and Anne Ferguson (2001), Hitchcock (2001), Ribot (1996; 1999), and Schroeder (1999) in Africa. This body of work has had profound influence on our understanding of contemporary political power and in particular policies related to environmental/resource management, even those that are premised on ‘decentralizing’ authority and control to the general populace. Inspired by this body of literature, I argue that the strategies involved in managing resources, such as forests in Nepal, are providing the state with the ability to govern/manage not only its resources but also its population in an increasingly centralized manner, in a manner reminiscent of the early ideas of what constituted political economy – economy of government.

Several other writers have drawn on Foucault’s work and many of the ideas central to it. James Ferguson’s *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) is one of the earliest applications of Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ to the effects of ‘development’. Ferguson examines the manner in which ‘development’ policies and plans have fostered

an expansion of the government bureaucracy. In Ferguson's case, 'governmentality' is used to express "the idea that societies, economies, and government bureaucracies respond in a more or less reflexive, straight-forward way to policies and plans. In this conception the state apparatus is seen as a neutral instrument for implementing plans, while the government itself tends to appear as a machine for providing social services and engineering economic growth" (1990: 194). Even more important for Ferguson is that 'government' "is always the exercise of a power" such that the outcome of 'development' is "a peculiarly de-politicized conception of the state – and, of course, of the development project".

Perhaps one of the most important parallels between the situation Ferguson examines in Lesotho and that experienced with community forestry in Nepal is the importance of 'decentralization' and the degree to which the administrative activities designed to enable 'decentralization' have 'de-politicized' the expansion of the administration. However, for Ferguson, this is simply the result of bureaucratic expansion. In terms of the summary of Foucault's precise conceptualization of 'governmentality' provided above, Ferguson limits his usage only to the first component, the expansion of the administration.

Similar processes and strategies have been at work in India. Krishna Sivaramakrishnan (1995, 1996, 1998, 1999) has examined the relationship between the expansion of India's Forest Department and the formation of the colonial and post-independence state.

The contours of power – or the limits of statemaking – are shaped by structures and processes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination. Forest management was not only predicated on requisite scientific knowledge but on techniques of

validating or valorizing certain knowledge while discounting others. Thus was expertise constituted. The struggle over what knowledge was designated as expertise, who generated it, how it was certified, where it was located, and by whom it was practiced also became integral to statemaking (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 6).

With community forestry in Nepal, which has many historical and intellectual connections to India's Forest Service, "knowledge acquisition and dissemination" follow a similar pattern, though its amplitude is multiplied in Nepal's case.

The important connection between 'territory' and the state's attempts to further its control has recently been discussed by Vandergeest and Peluso's (1995) applying their notion of 'territorialization' to forestry in Thailand. "Territorialization," according to Vandergeest and Peluso refers to the process through which the state proceeded to divide its territory into overlapping political and economic zones, constituting "territorial civil administrative units". These new territorial units consequently "rearrange people and resources within these units, and create regulations delineating how and by whom these areas can be used. These zones are administered by agencies whose jurisdictions are territorial as well as functional. The territories are created by mapping; thus modern cartography plays a central role in the implementation and legitimation of territorial rule" (1995: 386). The practice of mapping, whether by the state or by local, indigenous, or other interest groups, has been explored recently by several other writers concerned with its power effects (Colchester 1997; Peluso 1995; Poole 1997; Harley 1988; Sirait 1994; Vandergeest 1996). Territorialization operates as a means of control, the authors argue, "by proscribing or prescribing specific activities within spatial boundaries" (1995: 388). By excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, the state sets about to control what people do and their access to natural resources within those

boundaries (1995: 388). Land titles and surveys, including those for taxation purposes or simply to delineate the location, area and contents of a forest or other resources, are amongst the key texts used to ‘textually mediate’ (Smith 1984) rights of access to resources, and the relations between local villagers and the state.

However, as useful as ‘territorialization’ may be for examining some of the processes associated with community forestry in Nepal, it is limited in its ability to fully account for the expansion of state control. Dividing spaces into (administrative) territories does not necessarily entail an expansion of control by the state, nor does it necessarily lead to the imposition of increased regulatory strategies and the notion of power deployed by the state through territorialization remains a coercive conceptualization. What is much more important in the case of community forestry is not the demarcation of territories per se - of forests and the location of the users who are given access to the forest – but rather the generation of knowledge of forests and forest users, the imposition of new rules and regulations, not only concerning how forests will be managed and used, but also what constitutes the appropriate form and functioning of the newly created institution, the community forestry user group. To recall, community forests may take any form – may be smaller, or larger than political-administrative units such as VDCs or wards and may even overlap them. Indeed, that community forests are ‘other territories’ set off from political-administrative units has caused conflicts in recent legislation involved in the Decentralization Act, and Local Administrative Acts. And that the trend in community forestry is to ‘decentralize’ control *beyond* the administrative structure would undermine the state’s control if it were based solely on the process of ‘territorialization’. Instead, there are several other practices, or “technologies of control”

(Sivaramakrishnan 1999), associated with modern state-making, and processes of modernization and development more generally, that need to be considered to fully appreciate the extent of governmental processes of control, especially as applied to community forestry in Nepal.

Richard Schroeder's (1997, 1999) examination of the "conditionalities" associated with community-based forest management in the Gambia raises several concerns that parallel in many ways the situation in Nepal with community forestry. Although the rhetoric accompanying forest management suggests a participatory environment designed to preserve community-based environmental knowledge and management systems, close inspection of management agreements and the contractual requirements they establish reveals how they "extend rather than devolve centralized control of resources and communities alike" (1999: 4). The Gambian German Forestry Project, according to Schroeder, only offers rural Gambian communities a form of 'graduated sovereignty' over communal forest reserves as a means of reducing the costs of forest management to the state and its donors. These community forestry concessions have been accompanied by strict conditions, however. Communal rights to resource control are only granted on contractual terms. In exchange for use rights, communities are required to develop detailed forest management plans and perform specific labor tasks. Community 'ownership' is then acquired in several stages under condition that the community continues to perform its obligation faithfully, as stipulated in the plan. Schroeder argues that although the Gambian national environmental action plan process is ostensibly designed to bring local voices into the environmental planning process and generate momentum in the direction of improved natural resource management, it has

been much better suited to the opposite goal: “rather than facilitate participation by locals, the structure of the process has instead simply ensured participation by outsiders, in this case the ‘global’ planners at the Bank and the technocratic managers of the state and its European donors” (1997: 3).<sup>42</sup>

### **Modern Practices and Strategies of Control**

*Community forestry is forest management based on a partnership (agreement) between a Forest User Group and HMG. The Forest User Group assumes the responsibility to manage (protect, develop, and utilize) the forest resources on land owned by HMG in a sustainable manner.*

His Majesty’s Government (1992: 4)

*Forestry policies cannot tell us who controls forests any more than electoral codes tell us the powers that representatives can wield.*

Jesse Ribot (1999: 26)

Taking Nepal’s community forestry policy and legislation at face value would suggest that the authority to manage forests is ‘decentralized’ or devolved to local communities, while the role of the state is merely to facilitate and advise the newly created community forestry user groups. This rhetoric claims that forest user groups come to possess autonomous authority over their forests, and that the outcome is characterized by the principles of democracy (political representation, equality of access to forests, decentralized authority, etc.) and participation (i.e., power-sharing in decision-making, as well as involvement in management related activities among all members of the community). The remainder of this chapter will examine the ‘process of community forestry,’ the details of what is involved in creating community forestry user groups, ‘decentralizing’ control to them, and the sets of rules, regulations, and practices they must

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<sup>42</sup> The national environmental action plan was prepared in response to the World Bank’s policy that such plans be a condition for financial support (Schroeder 1997: 4).

adopt as “conditionalities” (Schroeder 1999) in order to manage and use their local community forest. In order to examine the community forestry process, and the tendencies of centralized control by the state, we need to distinguish between the practices associated with the “hand-over process” on the one hand, and on the other, those practices during the “post-formation” period associated with ‘institutional capacity building’.

According to the *Field Manual for Community and Private Forestry in Nepal*, the ‘hand-over’ of a community forest requires the specification of four essential features: a defined user group; a forest area; the user group’s objectives; and 4) rules and regulations for the protection of the forest. The *Field Manual* provides further detail on these features (McCracken 1992: 9-11):

- 1) The “defined user group” is to include the traditional users of the forest area...
- 2) The specification of the “forest area” includes: knowledge of species, size and condition; a sketch map and survey; and subdivision of the forest into management blocks, allowing annual harvest on a rotational basis....
- 3) Specification of the “users (management) objectives” will include their objectives in relation to fodder, fuel, bedding/forage, timber, charcoal, and/or minor forest products (medicinals, food, religious)...
- 4) “Protection” will include: control over the harvesting of all products, including a prohibition on grazing in the forest; hiring a forest watcher(s), prevention of fires and fire fighting, controlling soil erosion, and protecting wildlife.

The fulfillment of these four features is accomplished through a series of ten stages that all communities must experience in order to be granted management responsibility

(Figure 5.1.).<sup>43</sup> Although the process is not overly complicated, it often takes as many as

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<sup>43</sup> The outline of these stages comes from the second of three one-day ‘orientation workshops’ I attended in the Myagdi District Forest Office in December 1998. The workshop was being held to familiarize a number of new staff hired for the Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project’s western field office in Baglung. Also in attendance were the District Forest Officers from Myagdi, Baglung, and



twelve or more months to complete. For example, in the case of the Manohar Mandir Community Forest User Group in Manohar, the process lasted two and a half years, with them receiving official notification finally in May, 2000.<sup>44</sup>

The first stage in the formation process begins with a meeting between members of the community and forest rangers from the District Forest Office (DFO). Stage two of the process involves meeting with villagers in which “careful attention is made to identify the traditional users of the forest.... to include women, the poor and dalits (low-castes), and all the villagers who depend on that forest”. During the third stage members meet as a “user group” to ‘elect’ a committee (including a chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, and as many as 13 or 15 other members), discuss what they want from the forest and how they will manage the forest. This stage is often combined with the fourth stage, when group members assist the forest ranger in preparing a preliminary map of the forest, including prominent geographic features and location of group members’ residences. The user group and the forest ranger will meet to prepare and review a draft version of the ‘operational plan,’ including what, when, and how products are to be managed and harvested by the user group. Prior to the preparation of the final draft, the forest ranger will conduct a relatively thorough survey of the forest, making a technical assessment of

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Parbat districts, four forest rangers, the NUKCFP’s new field office coordinator, and four other project staff.

<sup>44</sup> When I entered Manohar in 1998, the Manohar Mandir CFUG was just in the process of finalizing the draft of its operational plan. Throughout this entire process, the user group had been managing their forest following the management rules and practices as specified in the Rahu Ghat CFUG operational plan. In fact, the operational plans of the two user groups were almost mirror images of one another.

Part of the delay in finalizing the hand-over was due to a conflict associated with the forest area, which had previously been part of a *birta* land grant to a large Malla family in the village. Some of the specifics of this case are discussed further in Chapter 8.

the forest, listing major vegetation types, condition of the soil, and major tree species.

After the District Forest Officer approves the operational plan, the (formal) responsibility for management is passed from HMG to the user group.

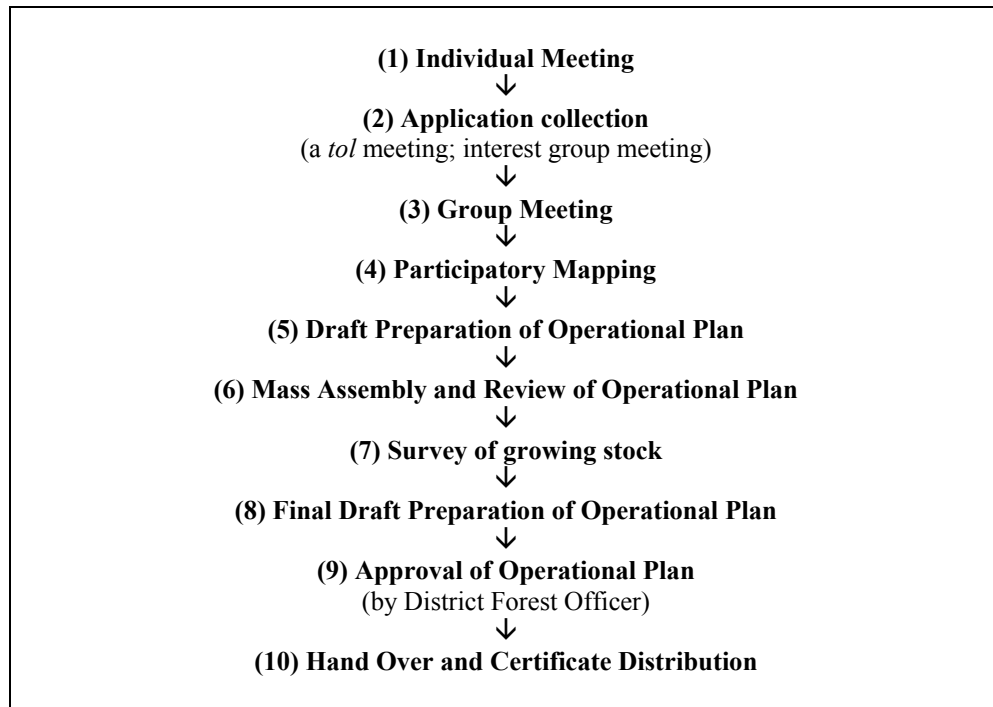


Figure 5.1: Stages in the Community Forestry Formation Process  
Source: Fieldnotes, December 1998.

Despite the description above, which represents the ‘ideal’ according to Department of Forests guidelines, according to several of the forest rangers whom I interviewed in Myagdi (and other districts) a much different process takes place in practice. Although it is becoming increasingly common for villagers to initiate the process by contacting their local forest ranger or DFO, it is far more common for forest rangers to first identify communities and forest areas suitable for hand-over.<sup>45</sup> During

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<sup>45</sup> Several authors point out that the “handing over” mandate is further compromised by the fact that the government authorities retain considerable, if not overriding, jurisdiction and discretion over the

many of the meetings, even when the ‘group meeting’ is called to assemble all the members of the user group, attendance is generally quite poor and limited mostly to those individuals who become members of the user group committee, who will eventually be charged with the authority to make and enforce decisions, amend rules, etc. The appointment of the committee members is often just that, an appointment by a select few, and/or by the forest ranger who is often instrumental, despite the rhetoric of ‘democratic’ or consensus-based ‘elections’. When I asked the forest ranger who had assisted in the formation of the Manohar Mandir CFUG about the (s)election of committee members, he told me “I helped them to see who is a good leader, who is knowledgeable about village matters. The user group needs people who are educated and can meet with villagers and forest staff regularly. This is how I suggested who to choose.”

Once hand-over is completed the user group is then required to participate by following the rules and procedures as specified in the management plan, including keeping records, monitoring practices, and participating in several post-formation activities such as planning meetings and several different varieties of workshops designed to modernize (i.e., democratize) all aspects of community forestry (see also Schroeder 1999).

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entire process (Talbot and Khadka 1994; Schroeder 1999). For example, an inherent problem of the application process stems from the DFO’s power to delay or deny the submission of an Operational Plan, thus preventing a user group from legally functioning. And while the DFOs are charged with assisting the user community meet these procedural requirements, they are also charged with regulating and enforcing the law. This establishes the potential for conflicts of interest, especially in terms of encouraging the potential for corruption by the DFO in exercising his enforcement powers (Talbot and Khadka 1994).

## The Management Plan

Although the creation and organization of the user group is given a great deal of attention in the literature on community forestry, it is the writing and approval of the management plan (*byawasthaapan yojanaa*) which marks the transfer of management control and responsibility from the state to the user group. The user group, however, only maintains its use rights and responsibility for forest management on the condition that it fulfills the rules and regulations as specified in the management plan. As Schroeder (1999) has noted in the case of community forestry in the Gambia, the management plan functions as a kind of contract between the state and the community forestry user group; it stipulates an agreement between the state and the user group, and specifies the responsibilities of each. Often overlooked is the simple fact that the ‘control’ that user groups receive does not derive from a transfer of ownership from the state to the user group. As Messerschmidt (1994: 36) has so aptly noted, “the operative term is *users’* group, not owners’ group”. As spelled out in Article 27 of the Forest Act, 1993 (HMG 1993) the threat of legal sanction always remains with the state, the state remains the owner even of community forests, has the power to regain control over them at any time, as well as change rules and regulations regarding their use.<sup>46</sup>

These management plans are by no means simple documents. The operational plan for the Ghatte Khola community forestry user group took my research assistant,

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<sup>46</sup> Consider some of the recent attempts to make an amendment to the Forest Act 1997 – an attempt to levy a tax on the sale of forest products... These actions caused a great deal of alarm and criticism... FECOFUN, the national association of CFUGs, moved quickly to resist these actions, receiving a great deal of resistance by villagers, and led by FECOFUN. The government’s attempt to pass the amendment unilaterally was also criticized by many community forestry project personnel, and even forest department staff, as an example of the heavy-handedness of the government, and its ultimate authority in dictating policy and law over the management of forests (citations: .

Benktesh Sharma (a student at the Institute of Forestry and at the top of his class), much longer than even he expected to translate. In an effort to apologize for taking so long to translate the document, he told me, “I had to find a legal dictionary [in Nepali], because I couldn’t understand many of the concepts. It is very difficult to understand”. It is not surprising, then, that very few committee members, let alone general user group members, have ever read the document, or for that matter are even aware of the details of its content (which I discuss further in Chapter 7).

There is also a tension between the need for flexibility in the implementation of the management plans and the rigidity and formality associated with them. As an example, the imposition of administrative procedures (such as record keeping) may, in some cases, be inappropriate to the level of capacity of some villagers to achieve given their literacy level and general administrative experience. Community forestry guidelines dictate that all user groups form ‘committees’ for decision-making and the formulation of operational plans, despite the fact that such institutions may not exist in all indigenous management systems. Indeed, indigenous systems where they do exist, rarely seem to have such formal ‘committee’ organizations, are much more informal, and are often led by one or two highly charismatic and powerful local leaders (R. Pokharel, personal communication; see also Messerschmidt 1995b).

The more general purpose of management plans is that they serve as a compilation of rules, regulations, procedures, and information about the forest and the population, and thus tend to have the same general content.<sup>47</sup> In theory, management plans are to be generated by the community, based on their ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’

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<sup>47</sup> Appendix A provides an outline of the basic contents found in all management plans.

systems of management (as so many reports and publications proclaim); in practice, they are often just written by the forest ranger and only slightly amended by the user group. Often the only input villagers have is in terms of specifying the amounts for collection fees and fines, and occasionally when products can be harvested. In this way the management plan is instrumental in introducing a decidedly western, rational forest management regime. This tendency is evident in community forestry in the Gambia (Schroeder 1999) and the efforts of the Indian Forest Department; “A working plan sets forth the purpose with which a forest should be managed so as *to meet the interests and wishes of the owner*, and indicates the means by which the purpose may be achieved” (D’Arcy 1989: 01; quoted in Sivaramakrishnan 1995: 17-18, emphasis by Sivaramakrishnan).

Management plans are more than just a set of rules and procedures that the user group follows in the course of its management of forests; they are also repositories of information about the user group and the forest resources themselves. The user group keeps copies of the operational plans, there are copies stored in the range post, the district forest office and the regional forest office. In addition, many of the bi-laterally funded community forestry projects (chief among them, the Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project) also keep copies of the operational plans, as well as collections of reports, studies, and other data on user groups and forests.

### **Expertise, Documentation, and Knowledge/Power**

Recall that for Foucault, there exists a pervasive complicity of scientific expertise in modern forms of state control, domination and disciplinary power. The role of the forestry profession, with its expertise, is an obvious example. When forestry staff write

management plans, survey forests, recording their contents, and write reports about user groups plans, they are engaged in an entire process involving what Scott refers to as ‘legibility and simplification’: “Whatever their other purposes, the designs of scientific forestry and agriculture and the layouts of plantations, collective farms, ujamaa villages, and strategic hamlets all seemed calculated to make the terrain, its products, and its workforce more legible – and hence manipulable – from above and from the center” (1998: 2). He notes how “officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices... and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored” (1998: 2). For Scott, “modern statecraft,” which was “devoted to rationalizing and standardizing what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format... made possible quite discriminating interventions of every kind, such as public-health measures, political surveillance, and relief of the poor” (1998: 3).

Anthropologists, geographers, and other researchers, as well as community forestry projects, are also implicated in this process of knowledge production. The research documenting indigenous forest management practices was extremely important in providing support for the shift to a more ‘community-based’ approach to forest management (Molnar 1981; Messerschmidt 1987, 1989, 1995a; Fisher & Gilmour 1991). The proliferation of an enormous body of knowledge generated in the name of improved forest management has also been of crucial importance to ‘technologies of power’. The NUKCFP, as I have mentioned, is considered one of the more successful community forestry projects in Nepal. In part this has had to do with their support of district forest office staff, their contribution to policy formation, the high number of user groups formed

in their project area, and the ‘improvements’ in those groups’ ‘institutional capacity’.<sup>48</sup> Another reason is the immense collection of reports, studies, and data they have generated on the user groups in their project area. These documents and data are not only housed in the main project office in Kathmandu, but include libraries, several computers, and ‘information officers’ to store the materials in both of the project’s field offices in Dhankuta and Baglung. This documentation, as useful as it might be in “improving the sustainability of forest management,” has the unintended consequence of producing what Dorothy Smith describes as “textually-mediated social relations” (1984) which feeds into greater ‘governmental control’. Sivaramakrishnan writes of how in the case of forest management in colonial India this proliferation of knowledge facilitated ‘technologies of rule’ (1995: 6).<sup>49</sup>

The generation of knowledge is not limited to operational plans; the series of reports conducted by community forestry projects, or even studies written by researchers such as myself, is part of a much larger process of transcription and legibility that extends down to the local level and implicates villagers themselves. One of the important modern bureaucratic-institutional practices that CFUGs are required to perform as part of their contractual agreement with the state, is that they keep a detailed record of meeting minutes, decisions made, management activities completed, income generated through harvesting fees and fines, their expenditure on local community development activities,

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<sup>48</sup> This support includes several training workshops on such subjects as record-keeping, surveying and mapping techniques, gender empowerment and sensitivity, range post capacity building, and monitoring

<sup>49</sup> This is also not unlike a larger Orientalist project of constructing Nepal, India, or any other ‘Other’ as knowable by representation (Said 1978; Sivaramakrishnan 1995: 6)



among other kinds of information. These activities, it is argued, produce greater ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ in community forestry. This is needed, it is argued, in order to reduce various kinds of ‘corruption’ and exploitation by committee members, a problem that has reportedly plagued community forestry – not to mention development in general, and of course politics (see for example Caplan 1971; Kondos 1987; Bista 1991). ‘Transparency’ allows the members of the user group, it is claimed, to ensure the proper functioning of their user group. But the production of these records is not just kept by the CFUG for their institutional functioning. All user groups are required to submit copies of these documents to the DFO on a yearly basis, so that forest rangers and the district forest officer can better monitor their activities.<sup>50</sup>

### **Monitoring and Planning**

‘Monitoring’ (especially ‘self-monitoring’) and ‘planning’ are central features of the current development discourse, and have become integral components of ‘post-formation support’ in the ‘community forestry process’. Consider the current attempts by the Department of Forests to introduce ‘monitoring and evaluation’ strategies into community forestry. The following list of points come from the most recent National Planning meeting, held in 1998 (HMG 1999):

- Improve relationship between FUGs/Range Posts and central levels by following participatory monitoring and evaluation
- For effective monitoring and evaluation at all levels, carry out awareness raising programs such as training and workshops

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<sup>50</sup> For this reason, the majority of CFUG committee secretaries are local teachers, regardless of their standing in the community or their needs vis-à-vis forest resources. I was told of many occasions where teachers who were village residents, but not otherwise part of the general membership of the user group, being asked to be their secretary. The implications of this tendency, and the general practice of keeping records and the proliferation of documentation (requiring reading and writing skills) associated with community forestry is explored in greater detail in the second section of this study, especially Chapter 7.

- Develop self-monitoring and evaluation systems in the FUGs
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation section in all districts
- Develop a system for information flow at central, regional and district levels
- Relevant projects should support the Forestry Research and Survey Center for developing materials and maps for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating community forestry.

Assisting the Department of Forests in this regard are each of the donor-funded projects, which also have project components to ‘institutionalize’ monitoring (and planning) as part of the modern functioning of user groups. The NUKCFP, for example, has emphasized this in all its major project documents since 1995, and has produced no less than a dozen reports on monitoring, record-keeping, and information management among user groups.

Planning, like record keeping and monitoring, is considered one of the essential elements of the “community forestry process”. Much effort is made on behalf of projects to institutionalize a “planning process” at several levels – village, district, regional, and national. Planning workshops are organized at multiple levels (see Figure 5.2.). There are ‘pre-planning workshops,’ ‘planning assemblies,’ and ‘planning meetings’ among forest users groups, as well as planning workshops at the range post level that bring together as many as 6 forest users groups (ideally they are to meet to discuss planning and issues 3 times per year). There is District Forest Office planning, DDC planning, Area planning, Regional Planning, Project Planning (at the field office level), Project Coordination Committee planning, MoFSC as well as DoF planning, and planning by the National Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance. Planning apparently isn’t something that just happens. There are criteria to judge whether the planning process is

successful or not. These planning workshops, projects would have us believe, facilitates participation in a dialogue where the “ideas and opinions from the forest users

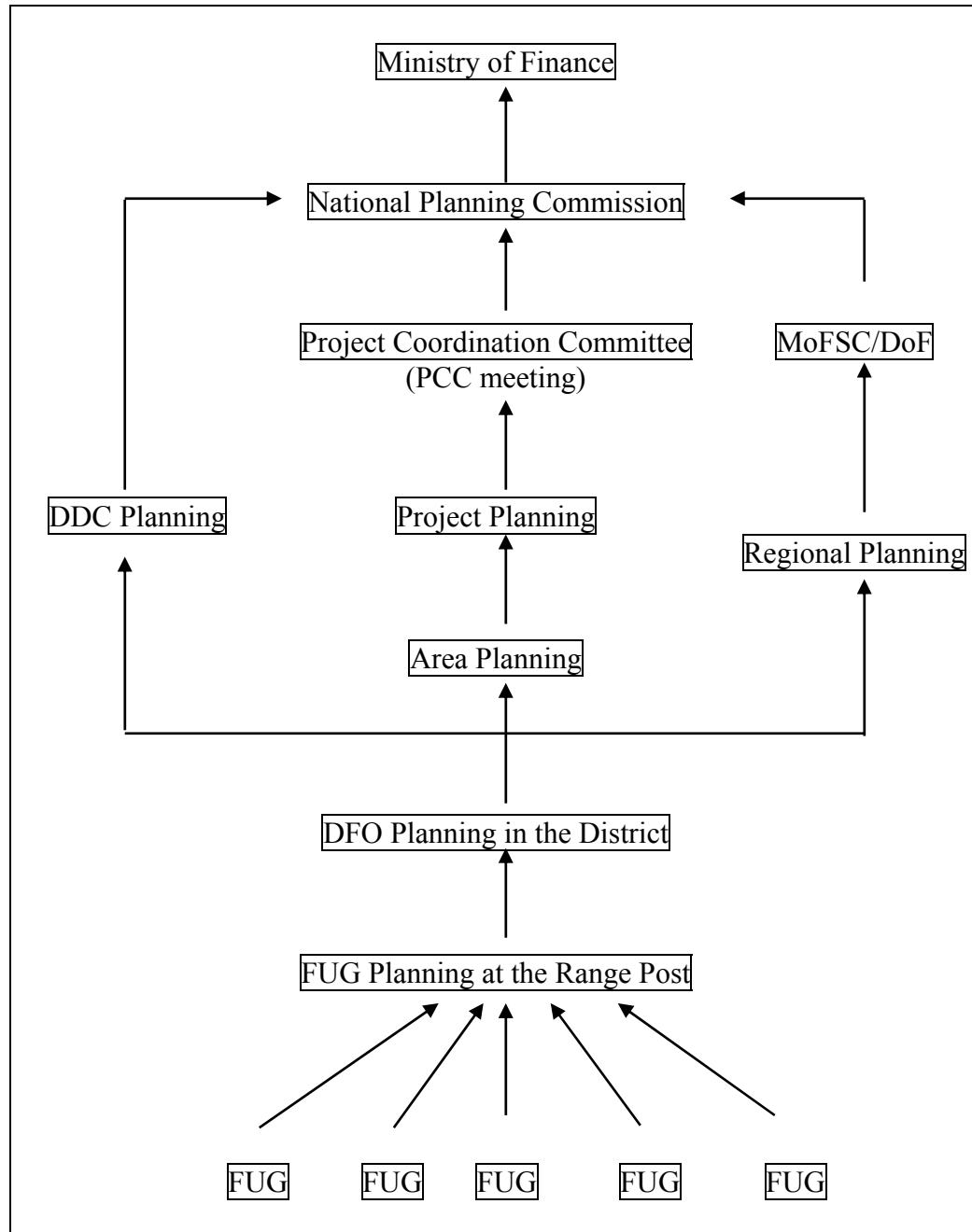


Figure 5.2. The Community Forestry Planning Process  
Source: NUKCFP Project Summary, 1996.

themselves” influence the direction of decisions and policy. But there is little if any evidence to suggest that policies have ever been shaped by local level forest users. Neat, new diagrams portray the importance given to ‘bottom-up’ planning, as if inverting arrows on a diagram were enough to reverse years of centralized control (Figure 5.2.). These diagrams could also be read in terms of accountability and the flow of information.

Whether or not local villagers’ views are actually taken into consideration, is at the moment less of an issue than the transcription and flows of information that planning enables. The planning process (Figure 5.2.) can also be read as a mapping of the direction of information as it moves upwards in the bureaucracy – as would be the case through ‘monitoring and evaluation’.

### **The “Vision” of Community Forestry**

Workshops and planning meetings are not held at the local level exclusively. Since 1987 HMG has organized three National Community Forestry Workshops “in order to review and reflect on policy issues and to discuss and obtain national consensus on the different aspects of community forestry” (HMG 1999: 2). Consider the most recent National Workshop Proceedings that, interestingly, has emphasized the new ‘vision’ of community forestry. On the cover of the proceedings is a photo of a forested hillside with Machhapuchre (one of the most recognizable mountains of Nepal visible from the Pokhara valley) in the background. Located, rather curiously, next to the title “Community Forestry for Everybody Forever” is an eye drawn onto the photo (Figure 5.3.). The conceptualization of ‘vision’ suggested is not (only) that of an imagined, desirable future or newer, better policies to be pursued, but rather (or also) the state’s

ability to observe ‘everybody’ and ‘everything,’ a means of surveillance, even an omniscience, not unlike the panopticon imagined by Jeremy Bentham (Foucault 1979).<sup>51</sup>

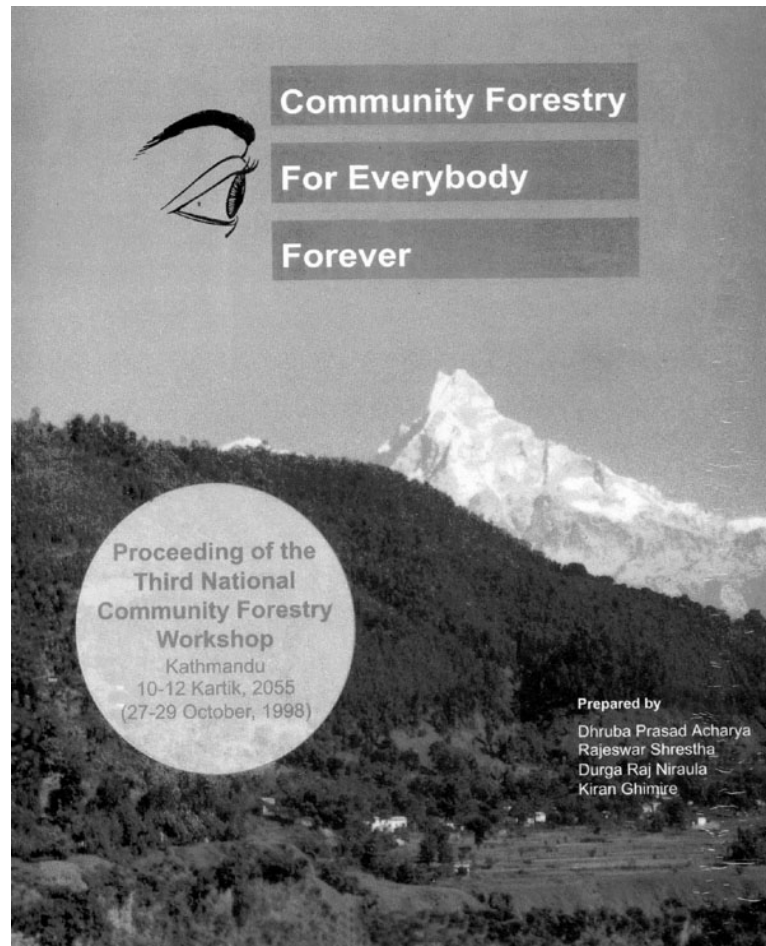


Figure 5.3. Cover of the Third National Community Forestry Workshop Proceedings.  
Source: HMG 1999

The authors who prepared the document discuss the idea of ‘vision’ in terms of envisaging/imagining a set of future outcomes that are used to plan a course of action to pursue those outcomes. It is ironic, though not surprising, that the sought after future of a

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<sup>51</sup> This refers to Jeremy Bentham’s design to introduce an unprecedented degree of economy and surveillance into the prison system.

‘successful’ community forestry entails such a large constellation of strategies, in which identification, transcription, record keeping, transparency, monitoring, information management – all ‘visionary’ technologies – play a central and centralizing role. For example, monitoring in the community forestry program used to focus on the amount of forest area handed over to forest users groups (and was only done by the Department of Forests), but is now more ‘qualitative’ in nature, considering how people benefit, who benefits, and how much, and is increasingly involving communities to monitor (and discipline) themselves – ostensibly for themselves but also for the state.

Planning is not only used to direct future desirable outcomes, or contribute (as development projects often proclaim) to reshaping future policy in a participatory manner; i.e., that the results of these planning workshops are used to influence the decisions of forest rangers in their planning workshops with the district forest officer, and so on, up to the level of national planning workshops. Indeed, it seems that this is only a small part of how planning workshops are viewed by forest staff. These planning workshops are used to introduce new community forestry initiatives, improve local ‘institutional capacity,’ and direct future forest use and management according to changing policies.

While planning has long been the purview of the highest ranks of the ministry of forests, etc., planning is an activity increasingly being ‘institutionalized’ at all levels, from the national on down to the local range post level. On a rather cold November morning I joined a group of villagers in the local school as they sat awkwardly at the desks in the small, dimly lit classroom. Attending the one-day meeting were groups of four committee members from six separate community forestry user groups from

Manohar and two adjacent villages, Jhi and Ghatan. We listened as the two district forest rangers from the nearest range post, located in Galeshwor, explained the purpose of this ‘planning meeting’. During the meeting, members from each user group were asked to design and present to the group and the forest rangers, their ‘next year’s plan’ for forest management; when forest products (fodder, fuelwood, timber, etc.) could be collected, the amounts available for harvest, fees charged for products, expenditures on forest improvement, and other management related activities (e.g., clearing the forest of dead or dying trees, pruning and coppicing, planting seedlings, nursery maintenance, etc.).

Ostensibly, range post level planning meetings, such as this one, are just another of the components to introduce local level ‘institutional capacity building’. As Raj Mahato, one of the forest rangers explained, “This planning meeting is to help FUGs move forward, so that they can improve their forests and have a better vision for the future. It improves their capacity to manage the forest. This is more scientific forest management”. The details of these activities were recorded by each of the FUGs as well as by the forest rangers. Each user group wrote their plans in notebooks and in charts on large three by four foot sheets of paper provided by the forest rangers. While for the benefit of the FUGs, the group’s plans are also useful to the forest rangers in their monitoring and regulating of the activities of FUGs. A record of each FUG’s plan for the following year, according to Gajendra Thakur, another of the forest rangers in Myagdi district, “allows us [the District Forest Office] to know what FUGs are doing in their forests. We can monitor [the forest users]... so we can know what they are doing. We can make sure that they are not breaking the rules of their [operational] plans and are following the rules properly.”

## Participation

‘Participation’ (*sahabhagita*; or “to participate,” *bhaag linu*) occupies an important position in community forestry, as it does in other conservation and development programs in Nepal (and elsewhere) (Chhetri 1999). If community forestry is anything, it must be ‘participatory.’ Policies and projects have been designed to provide a participatory environment, and every single donor-supported community forestry project in Nepal strives to raise the levels of ‘participation’ of all members of forest users groups, especially those who are identified as ‘disadvantaged’.

People’s participation and accountability will be enhanced in the community forestry process. Everyone in the community especially women, poor and disadvantaged will have equal access to and control over the decision-making process. All castes, dialects, religions, cultures, race and their norms and values will have recognition. The central and local organizations including political parties will be committed to the overall development of community forestry and forest user groups by playing the roles of motivations [sic] and facilitators. All stakeholders will work with the spirit of community development (NUKCFP unpublished handout).

As the quote above illustrates, the incorporation of ‘participation’ in community forestry is exceedingly ambitious, if not also rather naïve and highly problematic.

As written into project documents and policies, and as used by project staff, “participation” within the context of implementing community forestry is an essential, though unquestioned, feature. Majid Rahnema, however, warns of participation’s slippery, arbitrary nature: it may be “either moral, amoral, or immoral; either forced or free; either manipulative or spontaneous” (1992: 116). In the context of community forestry, ‘participation’ is desirable and acquires a moral quality where it overlaps with such powerful ideas as ‘democracy’ and ‘equality’. It is generally *assumed* that if



everyone in a “community” – that is, all of the members of a user group, including the poor, women, and lower caste members – is ‘participating’ in all of the activities associated with community forestry (collecting forest products, nursery and other forest maintenance work, attending meetings), then the management of community forests is somehow better and all the members are necessarily better off. In this sense, ‘participation’ is also perceived as a “free exercise” (Rahnema 1992: 116).

Although improved access to forests is certainly in villagers’ best interest, and one of the reasons why they are so eager to get engaged in the community forestry process, it is unclear to what extent user group members willingly take part in the proscribed management activities. That their participation may be a necessary condition of their being granted management responsibility (Schroeder 1999), or simply “manipulated, or teleguided” (in which the participants may not feel they are being forced into managing forests, but are actually led, inspired, or directed to participate by forces outside their control) (Rahnema 1992: 116), casts the ‘participatory’ nature of community forestry into question. Even within the user group, all members of the group are *required* to ‘participate’ in the various management operations.

Consider how the rhetoric of greater participation has also been used not only to get ‘the community’ involved in management, but also to promote a broader, more inclusive ‘community’. The lack of participation among women and other disadvantaged individuals has perpetually stymied the ambitious desire to make community forestry a truly egalitarian (i.e., ‘democratic’) program. It was suggested in a recent workshop held at the national level that participation should be increased “by making it a mandatory policy provision” (HMG 1999: 15). It is an interesting proposition – and indicative of the

primacy of the term – that ‘participation’ can, or even should, be legislated and made mandatory. “Participation” portrayed in this sense, may or may not serve the best interests of villagers, but certainly serves the interests of the state as it ensures that the entire population is brought together within the scope of community forestry. The emphasis on equality and universal inclusion brings together villagers in ways not achievable through other means. This is not just another accounting of villagers, as in census records or land ownership records, which are highly problematic in Nepal and may not include nearly as many households. Written into management plans, the state has made villagers legible and more easily subject to political surveillance (Scott 1998; Schroeder 1999).

The degree of ‘participation’ also comes to signify the degree of modernization (Rahnema 1992: 116). Attendance at meetings, when couched as ‘participation,’ elides the actual degree of inequality inherent in the group, and the actual degree to which attending members have any actual say in the decisions being made. Often this kind of ‘participation’ only provides a context for endorsement of the decisions made by the committee, or the chair and vice-chair within the committee, rather than the degree of agency that disadvantaged and disempowered members possess and exercise.

‘Participation’ also operates as a politically attractive slogan. It has provided community forestry, especially in its ‘development’ guise, with a much-needed source of political legitimation. In that it suggests a scaling back of the bureaucracy, ‘participation’ is seen as synonymous with ‘decentralization’. And this has certainly helped to manufacture the impression that politicians and policy makers are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of forest users. Perhaps most important from the standpoint of the state,

‘participation’ is also an extremely economically appealing proposition, in that it allows the state to pass on the ‘costs’ and responsibility of management to the poor in the name of participation and its corollary, ‘self-help’. In Nepal this can be seen with the popular slogan “*aphnai gaun, aphnai banaaun*” as part of the “Build Your Village Yourself” program.

### **Summary**

While the devolution of authority to manage forests is frequently claimed to be a populist gesture – inviting ‘local’ participation, strengthening civil society – it has also been part of a deliberate strategy to decentralize costs and responsibilities for management (Schroeder 1999; Rahnema 1992). Indeed, many have also asserted that this has always been the main purpose, as the management of forest has never been possible with so few forest department staff and drastically insufficient resources. My problematization of community forestry as ‘governmentality’ is not simply about ‘sovereignty’ or ‘territorialization,’ or of the construction of hierarchical structures. Rather it is about the mortar of the structure, the modalities or ‘technologies of control’ that are being introduced in the name of ‘decentralized,’ ‘community-based’ forest management. ‘Decentralization,’ as I’ve attempted to show, does not turn the hierarchy of the state apparatus on its head, or explode the sovereign power of the state.

What this examination of community forestry reveals is that the practices associated with ‘decentralizing’ control of forest management to forest user groups do not provide conditions of autonomy, but rather resituate ‘communities’ in new sets of social relations that provide entirely new sources of centralized, ‘governmental’ control. The manifestation of this control over local communities and resources in Nepal is unlike any

previous attempts by the state. Unlike previous attempts to centralize control, community forestry provides a degree of legibility, regulation, monitoring, etc. of local practices and members of the community, that have not been possible to implement in the past through any other means, even the conventional strategies of bureaucratization and administrative expansion associated with politics. What makes community forestry especially productive of this kind of state power is not only the constellation of practices that contribute to this control, but that local villagers are actively engaged in embracing the program and its strategies as they are also related to several new and highly valorized notions – where decentralization is connected to democracy, and other related concepts such as equality and participation.

## **SECTION 2**

### **THE RECONFIGURATION OF LOCAL POLITICS THROUGH COMMUNITY FORESTRY**

Dominant conceptualizations of state-building (Vandergeest & Peluso 1993), based as they are on an oppositional model of state-society relations and a coercive notion of power, can at best provide only a partial account of the making of the modern state. It is not enough to attend to the power of the state alone. As a number of writers have argued (Foucault 1980; Giddens 1981, 1985; Nugent 1994; Gramsci 1971), power has an important dialectical dimension and is simultaneously enabling and disabling. In order to understand the bases and limits of state-building, consideration must therefore be given to the manner in which expanding (and contracting) state power may or may not be enabling of and/or disabling to the existing and emergent forms of social relations encountered in the process of expansion (Nugent 1994: 356; Sivaramakrishnan 1999).

In this section, my aim is to challenge and problematize several of the premises and conclusions of the first section of this dissertation. This is done not with the intention to claim that my argument in the first section, that community forestry is providing a means with which the Nepal government is able to acquire greater control over its population, is somehow misplaced, but rather to demonstrate that these processes of control are not complete, that local villagers are engaged in a variety of ways (and often in contradictory ways) with the state through the community forestry program. Only in exploring these processes, can we begin to see community forestry not only as a

set of structures, or simply as a coercive regulatory regime, but also as a ‘site of cultural production’ in which villagers (as ‘forest users’) are not simply passive recipients of the rules, procedures, and practices that the state (and other actors) ‘hand down to them’. Rather, villagers interpret, support, manipulate, embrace and/or resist these ‘technologies of control’ in multiple ways. In some respects, villagers in their ready acceptance to form community forest users groups and adopt the practices associated with an emerging regulatory apparatus, including the constellation of modern institutional practices associated with community forestry, become instrumental in furthering the state apparatus. But villagers are also provided with other opportunities for political advancement, greater control over resources, acquiring social capital, prestige, etc. at the local level. Such opportunities are, however, not open to everyone equally. There are several trends that emerge as the institutionalization of community forestry proceeds at the local level that suggest that various kinds of inequality may be exacerbated, rather than reduced, because of the program.

The chapters of this section are in many ways a contrast, theoretically and methodologically, to the chapters of the first section, even as they derive from the historical foundation established by them. The scale of analysis shifts from the level of the state, and those actors engaged at that level, to examine how community forestry operates ‘on the ground,’ in the context of the local village or community. As much as community forestry, as a set of policies, legislation, and guidelines for implementation, may be the product of activities that take place in offices and meeting rooms located in cities such as Kathmandu, Bangkok, Rome, London or Washington, all this effort is

intended to take effect in – to essentially be put into practice - by villagers located at the local, ‘community’ level.

Thus, I begin this section by providing a general description of Manohar, a small, but relatively prosperous village in the district of Myagdi in the Western Development Region of Nepal (Figures 1.1 and 6.1). This chapter describes the overall social, economic, and political context of Manohar, focusing on several of the important categories of social difference that affect access to resources, as well as involvement in the management of community forests. Also included in the discussion is an overview of the patterns of forest use and management that constitute community forestry as practiced within the village by three separate forest user groups.

Chapter 7 discusses the manner in which important aspects of social difference emerge around the management of community forests in Manohar. My focus is primarily on the ways in which caste and ethnicity, gender, wealth, and education figure prominently in villagers involvement in various practices associated with community forestry.

Chapter 8 extends the basic patterns that emerge in Chapter 7 by examining the relationship between politics and community forestry. Of particular importance is the degree to which community forestry is providing a new political space that seems to be enabling already established local political elites with the means to expand and further entrench their control over resources at the local level.

## CHAPTER 6

### LOCATING COMMUNITY FORESTRY

*It's not on any map, real places never are.*

*Herman Melville*

#### **The Village Setting**

Like so many rural areas, or ‘real places’ in Nepal, Manohar is a relatively isolated, out-of-the-way place in the middle hills of Western Nepal (Figure 1.1.). It is located roughly a half days travel on foot along a winding and sharply ascending trail from Beni, the nearest market center (*bazaar*) and the administrative capital of Myagdi district. And also like so many villages in Nepal, rather than a nucleated village, the households of Manohar are dispersed across an undulating hillside, ranging from an altitude of roughly 2000 meters above sea level to the Rahu Ghat River below at 750 m. The Rahu Ghat River forms the eastern boundary of Manohar and empties into the Kali Gandaki River, one of Nepal’s three major river valleys and a corridor that has served not only as one of the major trans-Himalayan trading routes for centuries but is also considered the “deepest river valley in the world.” To the north of Manohar, up the Rahu Ghat River valley towers Dhaulagiri, the seventh highest mountain in the world, while farther to the east, beyond the Kali Gandaki, lie the Annapurnas.

The climate of Manohar is monsoonal and despite its proximity to the high *himal* (snow-covered mountains) is primarily subtropical and thus surprisingly quite temperate throughout the year. Temperatures in the summer monsoon months (May through



August) range from highs of approximately 25-30°C and lows of 18-22°C while during the winter (December through February) highs of 18°C and lows of 5°C are common. Rainfall is consistent with the rest of the country following a monsoon climate; very wet summers and dry winters. The early pre-monsoon rains begin in May and eventually reach full force by June, running through to the end of August before tapering off gradually by the end of September. As autumn and winter arrive, so too does the most spectacular time of year. The lack of precipitation ensures clear skies to ripen the verdant hillsides of rice, also providing stunning, unobstructed views of some of the highest mountains in the world. The winter of 1998-99, the first of two winters I spent in Manohar was especially dry. In the 7 months between October when I first began living in the village until the end of April Manohar received only a single short 15-minute rain-shower. Villagers frequently remarked on the notable absence of rain, yet it did not have any detrimental effect on crops. The only problem this seemed to pose in the village involved a small spring, the source of drinking water for about 8 households, which began to dry up before the monsoon rains could replenish its source.<sup>52</sup>

Manohar is just one of many ‘real places’ in Nepal with a history as yet unwritten. The cultural history of the larger region in which Manohar is situated, adjacent to the Kali Gandaki river valley, has not been extensively documented. Hitchcock (1966), Macfarlane (1976), and Fisher (2001) have each written about neighboring areas along

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<sup>52</sup> The lack of rainfall was not isolated to areas of Myagdi district alone. Rainfall shortages and low river and stream levels had become extremely serious in the Kathmandu valley. By May 1999, when the pre-monsoon rains had yet to arrive, Kathmandu’s electrical supply, dependent on hydropower, had become seriously threatened. The rationing of electricity and power-outages (load-shedding) became more frequent. By the time the rains finally arrived, newspaper headlines reported that the capital had only one weeks worth of electricity remaining.

the Kali Gandaki, but other than extremely generalized historical trends or specific ethnographic accounts of single ethnic groups, little has been written about the history of this particular area of Nepal. Situated in the southeastern part of Myagdi district, Manohar is located in an area that was once subsumed within the Chaubisi Confederation that ruled this region of the middle hills prior to Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification of Nepal. The descendents of the Thakuri Malla lineage that once ruled this area have continued to constitute a large, and economically and politically powerful, section of the local population. Today, the descendents of the local Malla kingdom, however, constitute only part of the diverse caste and ethnic composition that characterizes Manohar, a situation that is common to the vast majority of villages throughout Nepal.

Politically, Manohar is a relatively new 'village'. During most of the *panchayat* era, most of the area of Manohar was part of Ghatan *panchayat*, Manohar's neighbor to the southeast. Then for a handful of years in the early 1980s, Wards 5, 6 and 7 were included in Jhi *panchayat*, adjacent to the northwest. It was not until the mid-1980s that Manohar became a separate *panchayat* of its own with its present boundaries (Figure 6.1.). Only a handful of villagers have knowledge of the early history of settlement of Manohar since the 1960s. Among these is Bishnu Chhetri, a slight woman in her mid-50s who often invited me to stop and have tea when I visited the community forest near her home. Unlike many of the men who have been long-term residents of Manohar, Bishnu has seldom left Manohar in the 45 years since she first arrived in the village. Married at the age of 9, Bishnu moved from her natal home (*maiti*) near Muktinath, a 3-day walk up the Kali Gandaki, to live in the household of her husband and his patrilineal

family. During one of our many conversations, Bishnu told me about Manohar when she first came to live in the village.

“There were only a few homes, when I first saw the village. There were 9 homes in Ward 4 and 6 homes in Ward 5. This house was built only 6 years ago. Before, our house was near where Deepak School is now. The boundary of this forest [pointing to the Ghatte Khola community forest about 40 meters below on the hillside] was to the top of this village. There was no school and no VDC office then. The school was built in 2021 [1964]. There was forest in the land where the school is now and that land was used as a graveyard for children.”

I asked Bishnu, “What kinds of changes have you seen living in village? How is life in Manohar different today than when you were a young bride?”

“There have been many changes. The need for money is greater these days. Before we used to have 1, 2, 3 *paisaa*, and they were silver and copper coins, but these days we use Rs. 100 notes. It is because we purchase more things than before. No one in the village used to buy sugar, tea, spices, etc., but now everybody buys such things. Everyone needs money, these days. We even pay for products from the forest. Before, we used to be able to go to the forest for free. At that time, we did not have the *panchayat* system, either. Then the *panchayat* system was started in 2020 [1963-64], and we had to beg from the *pradhan panch* [the *panchayat* chairman] to get fuelwood and fodder from the forest.... During the *panchayat* system, Manohar was in Ghatan village *panchayat*, and we had to walk far to see the [pradhan] *pancha*.... It has only been 15 years since it has been its own village. But now we are able to do our own development works. We have our own VDC funds to improve our school and trails. And we are going to build a new VDC office.

For many villagers, this new recognition has been important for the future prosperity and ‘development’ of Manohar, as well as their identity as members of this village.

The residents of Manohar tend to situate themselves in relation to other villages in Myagdi, and to larger towns and cities such as Beni, Pokhara, and Kathmandu, with reference to various markers of development. Despite the close proximity to the district center, Manohar is without electricity or telephone. Several villagers attributed this to party politics, and specifically the fact that the VDC Chair is from a different party than the District Chair. Both a power line and telephone running from Beni ends in the adjacent VDC. Despite these important markers/signs of “development,” and its location

just off of one of the most popular tourist routes in all of Nepal, Manohar is still a noticeably prosperous village.

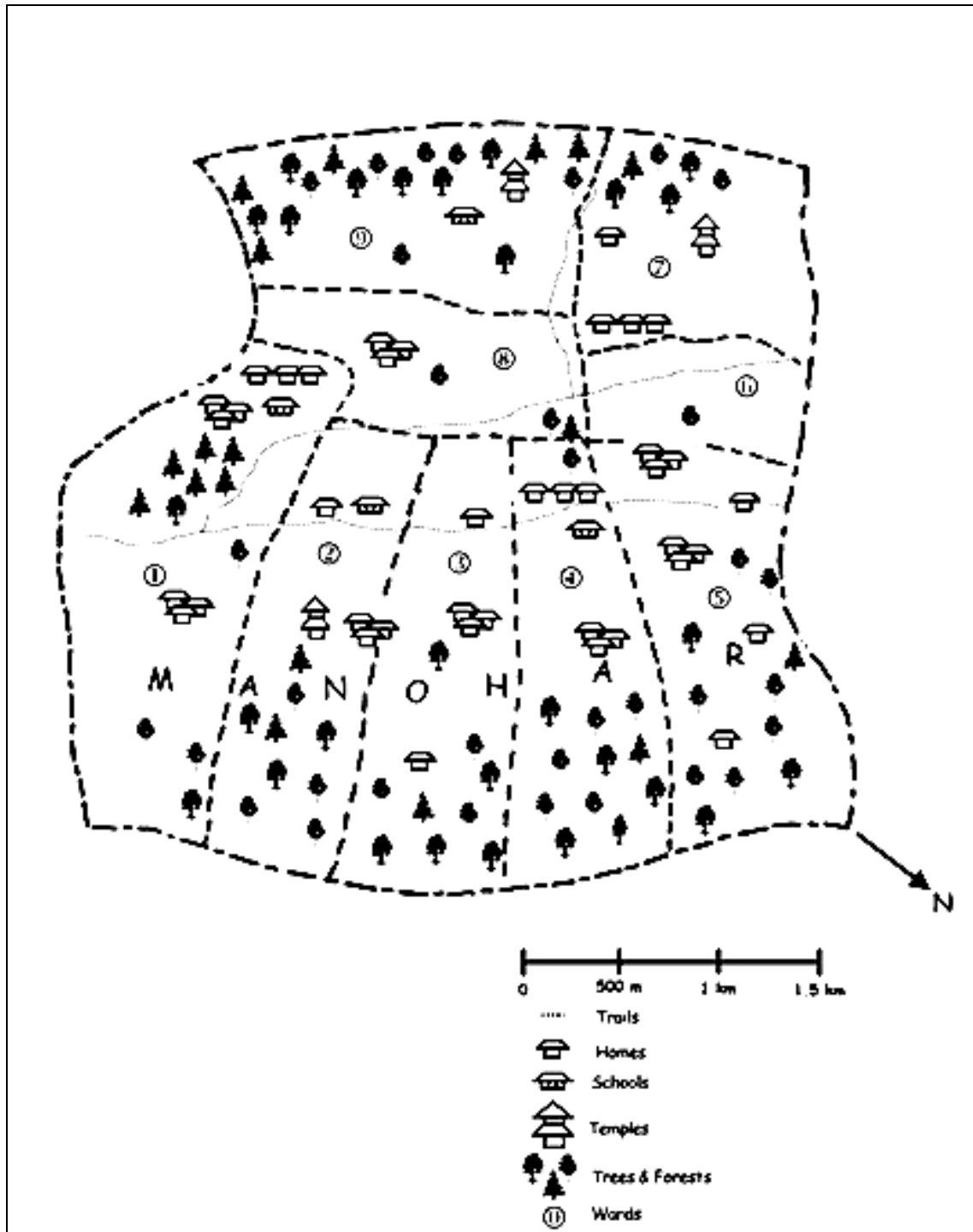


Figure 6.1. Map of Manohar

Unlike Manohar's neighbors in adjacent villages, neither electricity nor telephone service is available, although there is a government staffed health post, and until early 1999 there was also an Agricultural Development Bank office.<sup>53</sup> These are not just modern amenities, but important symbols of the relative degree of development in Manohar, as they are in so much of rural Nepal. Similar to processes discussed by Pigg (1992), villagers tend to situate themselves in relation to other villages, and larger towns and cities such as Beni, Baglung, Pokhara, and Kathmandu, on the basis of the presence/absence of important features of development; electricity, telephones, health posts and hospitals, motorable roads, schools. Many of the residents seemed to have trouble understanding why I would choose to live in such an "*abikasi*" (undeveloped) and "backward" village. They frequently asked, "Why do you want to live in this village? Our village is undeveloped? We have no electricity, no cars, no telephones?" These were questions, in villagers' eyes, I always seemed to answer inadequately.

### **The Basis of Subsistence**

From the moment I first entered Manohar I was aware that this was a noticeably affluent hill village, even despite its lack of some of the most obvious signs of 'development,' the absence of electricity or telephone service, and villagers disparaging remarks. More than 95% of the households in Manohar are principally engaged in agriculture, which, despite the productivity found in Manohar, is almost exclusively

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<sup>53</sup> The ADB office provided residents of Manohar, as well as those from several surrounding villages, with loans and technical support for improving agricultural productivity. One of the office's main projects involved loans for adopting high-yielding grains. In Manohar, however, only a dozen households had borrowed for such purposes. The main reason given for the closing of the office was due to the increasing prevalence of Maoist activity in Myagdi, as well as Baglung and other nearby districts.

subsistence-oriented. Villagers practice an agricultural pattern in which the main crops are rotated through a complex annual cycle. The main crop is rice grown on irrigated terraces during the summer monsoon, while maize, millet, as well as wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, and numerous varieties of legumes (mainly soybeans, peas, and lentils) are other important agricultural products. Additionally, a variety of seasonal vegetables are grown in small gardens, some of the more popular of which include cauliflower, spinach, onions, radish, and cabbage. In the last 10-15 years there have also been a number of efforts to increase the production of many crops, including vegetables, for market sale (because of the proximity of the relatively large market in Beni). Very little if any of the surplus that has been produced, however, is sold outside of the village (for reasons further discussed below).

What was once a hillside covered in large, dense forest patches of deciduous trees – of *utis* (Alnus), *chilaaune* (Schima), *katahar* (Artocarpus), *mahuwaa* (Bassia), *baans* (Bambusa), *phirphire* (Acer), *tuni* (Toona), *sallaa* (Pinus), and others – has given way to a combination of relatively large and highly productive *khet* (wet, irrigated) and *baari* (dry) fields carpeting the hillside in constantly changing hues of green and yellow (Figure 6.2.).<sup>54</sup> Many forest patches and individual trees still dot the hillside, stabilizing the steep slopes along small streams, trails, and the edges of terraces from soil erosion, while also providing a source of fodder (*ghaans paat*) for livestock. While the soils found in

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<sup>54</sup> It is important to note that this trend – involving the conversion of forests to agricultural land – has not been the only direction of change. All three of the community forests in Manohar cover a greater area and are more dense than they were even twenty years ago. In the case of the Manohar Mandir community forest, which is discussed further in Chapter 7, the area was under a swidden system of wild rice cultivation until approximately 65 years ago, and has since regenerated to its present state because of efforts to protect it by a number of related families.

Manohar include dark alluvial soils (*paango maato*), loam, gravel (*rodaa*) and clay (*chiplo maato*), it is the abundance of richly fertile alluvial and loam soils that are largely responsible for Manohar's agricultural productivity.



Figure 6.2. Rice terraces in Manohar with Dhaulagiri in the background

Nearly all households in Manohar own at least some livestock. Buffalo and cattle kept for their milk, and as a valuable source of fertilizer for fields, are also the most important sources of wealth other than land. Bulls are kept primarily as traction animals, while male buffalo are sold to butchers in local market centers. Goats are much less common, and seldom raised in the village. Instead, they are usually purchased shortly before being butchered for meat. Often a number of households will contribute to the purchase of a goat, and the meat is distributed accordingly. Several households also raise chickens, occasionally for meat, though more often for eggs which are sold to other families in the village. The ownership of cattle and buffalo, in particular, has

experienced a pattern of change in the last decade reversing the trends of the previous 30-40 years. Residents of Manohar report that although there is currently a greater overall number of livestock in the village today than throughout the history of settlement in the area, the number of livestock owned per household has declined in the past decade. In the past, a number of households apparently owned several head of buffalo and cattle, however only one household in the village owns more than 4 animals. Villagers explain that this is due to the reduction in available grazing land (especially forest land) in the village since the implementation of community forestry.

Table 6.1: Livestock ownership (per household) by Caste/Ethnic group

	<b>No. of Households</b>	<b>Buffalo</b>	<b>Bulls</b>	<b>Cows</b>	<b>Goats</b>
<b>Bahun</b>	53	1.189	0.960	0.906	0.115
<b>Chhetri</b>	27	1.318	0.860	1.000	0.091
<b>Thakuri</b>	22	0.926	0.850	0.731	0
<b>Magar</b>	27	1.259	0.860	0.593	0.111
<b>Thakali</b>	9	0.778	1.000	0	0.222
<b>Chantyal</b>	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Sarki</b>	12	0.500	0.920	1.700	0
<b>Kami</b>	7	1.143	1.570	0.429	0.143
<b>Damai</b>	1	0	1.000	1.000	0
<b>Total Ave</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>1.055</b>	<b>0.910</b>	<b>0.786</b>	<b>0.087</b>

Source: Household survey, 1999

Large numbers of livestock used to be owned by a number of the Magar families in the village. Devi Kumari Pun, a Magar woman whose family used to own a dozen buffalo and cattle, and who live just above the community forest, reflected on the difficulties of keeping so many livestock now:

When we took our animals to the forest to graze their health was much better. Now we must go to the forest year-round to collect fodder. Now the abundance



of forest products in the forest is much better, but we have much difficult work to do. It has become too difficult for me to do alone. This system [of restricted grazing] is only better for families with many people who can collect the products.

Like Devi Kumari Pun's family, others have been forced to reduce their numbers of livestock because of the immense labor burden, one that falls mostly on women.

### **The Division of Labor**

For the most part, the division of labor has changed little in Manohar, remaining similar to what it has been for generations following a predictable pattern of productive and domestic activities largely separated along gender lines. While women in the West have been called the 'invisible sex', the term seems more applicable to how the domestic contribution of village women in Nepal is typically overlooked and undervalued, since they carry the greatest burden of labor. Perhaps one of the most distinctive features of village life is the ubiquitous image of men assembled under large *pipal* or banyan trees (*Ficus*). While men often 'sit and gossip' (*gaaph garne*) with one another, women complete their daily work, which begins as early as 4 a.m. and does not end until 9 or 10 p.m. after the family has eaten and gone to bed. Nearly all of the domestic activities – processing food, cooking, cleaning the house and compound, collecting water from nearby water taps, childcare, laundry – are done by women in the family. In terms of farm production, men are exclusively responsible for ploughing fields, and irrigating and repairing terraces. Women's responsibilities include fertilizing fields, planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops, as well as threshing and storing the grain, and collecting fodder and fuelwood.

The many trees that are privately owned and grow along trails and terraces, and beside homes, are an important source of fodder for livestock. On most days, I would see young men and boys, and occasionally young girls, climbing these deciduous trees to



Figure 6.3. Women carrying fodder for livestock

strike off small branches with their small curved knives (*khurpa*). With the advent of community forestry, the large forests at the lower reaches of the village are no longer available for open grazing as they were in the past. Instead, cattle and buffalos are primarily stall fed, though on occasion may be grazed on previously harvested fields or on the small patches of grass along trails and paths. This has significantly increased the workload associated with maintaining livestock, as well as shifting the burden for feeding and maintaining them to women in the household. Traditionally, elderly men and/or young boys and girls were primarily responsible for the relatively easy task of grazing

livestock. Now, with grazing almost completely absent, the majority of the labor associated with keeping livestock is done by young women (15-30 years of age) in the household. The new labor demands involved in keeping livestock in stalls include carrying water (*paani haalnu*), collecting fodder (*ghaans*) and leaf litter (*sottar*), and cleaning out the manure from the stall to be used as fertilizer (*mal*) for fields. Because fodder and grass demands have increased, most women have to descend daily into the forest, which often involves as much as 4 hours of additional work per day.



Figure 6.4. Young girls carrying fuelwood

### **The Ownership of Land**

One of the most important sources of wealth for rural villagers, whether in Manohar or elsewhere in Nepal, is the ownership of land. Land is not only the source of villagers' livelihoods, but as many villagers would say, "land is our life". While nearly all villagers own some land, there are great disparities in the amount of land owned by

households.<sup>55</sup> As a result, not every family produces enough grain (rice or other crops) to meet its minimum needs for an entire year. These deficits are typically made up by renting additional land from some of the wealthier landowners, or by having one or more members of the household (usually males) work as hired agricultural laborers for others. The majority of families own a sufficient amount of land to produce crops for themselves (Tables 6.2. and 6.3). Only a very small number own enough land that they rent to others, though there is an even larger number who must supplement their own holdings by renting either additional *khet* or *baari* fields. Two of the wealthiest landowners have such a surplus that land is rented to several other households, and on the remaining land more than a dozen men and women are hired to plant and harvest crops each season. In terms of food sufficiency (Table 6.3), there is a similar pattern to that of landownership. While a majority of households manage to produce a sufficient amount of food, many other households vary in the number of months that their produce lasts.

Table 6.2: Land ownership by caste and ethnic group

Caste	Rent out	Own	Rent	Other
Bahun	5	53	4	0
Chhetri	0	27	5	0
Thakuri	0	22	6	0
Magar	3	26	3	1
Thakali	1	9	0	0
Chantyal	0	1	1	1
Sarki	0	12	1	0
Kami	0	7	1	0
Damai	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>

Source: Household survey, 1999

<sup>55</sup> Village landownership records were not in the VDC office during my stay in Manohar due to the dispute surrounding the Manohar Mandir community forest, discussed in Chapter 7. Instead, I asked villagers whether they owned and/or rented land, and whether the amount of food they produced was sufficient for the year.

Table 6.3. Food sufficiency by caste and ethnic group

Caste	Purchase	Up to 3 months	4-7 months	8-11 months	sufficient	surplus
Bahun	0	1	8	6	32	6
Chhetri	1	1	8	2	9	0
Thakuri	0	0	4	4	17	1
Magar	2	2	5	4	14	0
Thakali	0	0	1	0	5	3
Chantyal	1	1	0	0	0	0
Sarki	1	1	4	0	6	0
Kami	0	1	2	0	4	0
Damai	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(3.1%)</b>	<b>7</b> <b>(4.4%)</b>	<b>32</b> <b>(20%)</b>	<b>16</b> <b>(10%)</b>	<b>90</b> <b>(56.2%)</b>	<b>10</b> <b>(6.3%)</b>

Source: Household survey, 1999

Unlike the increasing incidence of landlessness found in so many other villages in Nepal, only three families in Manohar are without land to grow their own crops. Two of these are the young Chantyal couples, relatively recent residents of the village, while the other is a single Magar family who lost their land to debt in the late 1980s. One of the Chantyal families owns the home in which they live, while the other rents theirs with the income they derive from selling *raksi* (a home-brewed alcohol) to other villagers and various hired labor they provide. Chandra Rokka, his wife and six children are by far the poorest of Manohar's residents, living on the fringe of the community forest in a two-sided shelter in poorer condition than many of the temporary *goth* (shelters used when temporarily grazing livestock away from home) owned by other villagers. Without land and any permanent income, Chandra, his wife and children have all had to work for other villagers for small amounts of money or in-kind payments of rice, other grains, or vegetables to support themselves. About half-way through my thirteen month stay in Manohar, the Ghatte Khola CFUG hired Chandra as their forest guard, which provided him with a steady monthly income of Rs. 200 (approximately US\$3.30).

## Employment

Although nearly all households are engaged in subsistence agriculture, not all are dependent on it, and many must supplement their grain incomes with that of cash. But even some of the large surpluses that a few of the more wealthy landowners produce is not enough to compensate for the increasing importance of cash needed to purchase spices, tea, sugar, soap, medicine, school supplies for children, clothing or many other consumer goods now available in local shops and markets, or to pay for religious services or even the membership fees for access to the local community forest.

Table 6.4: Employment and Occupations among Residents of Manohar

Occupation	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total (%)
<b>Farm Labor</b>	23 (13.5)	42 (75.0)	65 (28.6)
<b>Business/Shop</b>	6 (3.5)	8 (14.3)	14 (6.2)
<b>Service</b>	10 (5.8)	3 (5.3)	13 (5.7)
<b>Emp. in Nepal</b>	23 (13.5)	0	23 (10.1)
<b>Emp. Abroad</b>	71 (41.5)	0	71 (31.3)
<b>Army<sup>56</sup></b>	15 (8.8)	0	15 (6.6)
<b>Army Pension</b>	20 (11.7)	1 (1.8)	21 (9.3)
<b>Religious</b>	3 (1.8)	2 (3.6)	5 (2.2)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>171</b> <b>(75.3%)</b>	<b>56</b> <b>(24.7%)</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Work other than farm-related</b>	<b>148</b> <b>(91.4%)</b>	<b>14</b> <b>(8.6%)</b>	<b>162</b>

Source: Household survey, 1999

For many families, the sale of livestock provides extra income, even if the sales involve only a few chickens or an occasional buffalo, cow, or goat. A handful of young Magar and Thakali men travel up the Kali Gandaki to Jomsom and Kagbeni in the few weeks before *dasain* (the major Hindu festival) every October to purchase several goats, in some cases as many as four or five dozen (a substantial investment). These are brought back to the village and sold to families in Manohar or neighboring villages, as

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<sup>56</sup> This includes employment in both the Indian and British Armies, though there are far more men employed in the former than the latter.

each household is obliged to slaughter a goat. A few families sell milk, eggs, and a number of Magar and Thakali, and both Chantyal, families also brew and sell homemade alcohol (*raksi*). The sale of *raksi* is an especially important source of income for many of the female-headed Magar households. Several villagers are also employed in various capacities within the village, as teachers, health post staff, and as the school and VDC office peons. There are also six small shops selling a number of consumer goods such as tea, sugar, spices, laundry soap, etc. Two of these shops, run by Thakali families, also provide food and lodging.

The most important source of local income for the majority of villagers, however, are labor jobs doing either farm-related work or construction. Most of this work for cash is done by men, and is seasonal rather than permanent. Although only twenty-three men reported doing wage labor in the village on a regular basis, almost all men had been engaged in this work at one time or another to supplement their income sources. Men are most often hired to plough fields, repair terraces, or build or repair homes, temples, or other village buildings. And while many men who do farm related work tend to work for the same families, none of the villagers considered this to be *riti-bhagya* (patron-client) relationships; many men often worked for members of the same caste, though many low caste laborers did tend to work for wealthier landowners, who do tend to be higher-caste families. Women are also hired as farm laborers – transplanting seedlings, carrying fertilizer, and harvesting crops, are the most common jobs – though they are typically paid in-kind rather than with cash as men are. The majority of women's work for others, however, tends to involve forms of reciprocal labor (discussed below), rather than for

cash or in-kind payments, and is even more often with friends and relatives than is the case with men.

Income from employment outside of the village has become an increasingly more common and important in the past few decades. During my stay in Manohar, nearly two-thirds of all households had at least one member (all of whom are male) who was employed outside the village. A number of men are employed by the government in other villages in Myagdi or in other districts, others have moved to Kathmandu, Pokhara, or other large cities in the *Terai* for employment as manual wage-laborers, while still others are employed in other countries, including India, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Malaysia, and Korea.

Although manual labor jobs are the most common form of employment outside the village, the most lucrative source of income is service in either the Indian or British Army. Ever since 1815, when the British began to recruit men from the middle hills for their Gurkha regiments, joining the army has been a popular source of income. Of those men who are now receiving pensions from the Indian and British Army, some are receiving as much as Rs. 30,000 (US \$500) yearly. This is a significant income compared to a national per capita income of approximately Rs. 11,000 (US \$180).

During my first few weeks in the village, I was eagerly approached by many men who thought I was a recruiter for the British Army or for employment in other countries.

While most men are in the Indian Army and serve only in India (a number of whom were stationed in Kashmir), the eight men who have served in the British Army have been stationed in Borneo, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. Dal Bahadur Rokka, an outgoing and boisterous ex-Gurkha, who served for 24 years before returning to Manohar to build a



new home and retire, would often recount his travels that even included several months in Canada.

The availability of relatively large incomes has also been one of the reasons why there is not an interest in engaging in the sale of agricultural produce in the market. Even the dozen or so families who are part of a 'seed group,' who have received loans from the Agricultural Development Bank to purchase improved varieties provided by the British-funded Agricultural Research Station in Lumle (near Pokhara), the amount of labor involved in transporting the produce to market is a major disincentive.

### **Other Work Arrangements**

Not all labor performed in the village is considered 'employment'. There are a variety of arrangements involving work groups and relationships that bring together a number of different families that crosscut caste and gender lines. Messerschmidt (1981) has written more generally about *parma* (reciprocal), *nogar*, and other kinds of groups found throughout Nepal more generally; Hitchcock (1966) has documented cooperative and wage labor groups among Magars; and, more recently Cameron (1998) has more closely examined *riti-bhagya* (patron-client) relationships, as well as *parma*, *nimak* (in kind), and *jyala* (cash) arrangements, among and between high- and low-castes in far western Nepal.

In Manohar, *riti-bhagya* (patron-client) relationships have almost completely disappeared, and reportedly were never very common. Most explanations point to the relatively recent settlement of this area, although some of the elder members of some Malla families, and others who have been the longest inhabitants of the village, stated that these were in practice many years ago, but became less important as low-castes have

been able to find employment outside of the village. That many of the low-caste families own relatively sufficient amounts of land has also given them a greater degree of autonomy, as is the case in most other villages (see Cameron 1998).

Very common in Manohar, however, are the relatively informal reciprocal arrangements among households, related families, and friends involving *parma*, arrangements involving reciprocal forms of cooperation. The tendency for these work groups to involve women rather than men, as Cameron (1998) found in her research, is less pronounced in Manohar, although the kinds of work done by these groups mirrors the gendered division of labor. Groups of men would assist one another in the arduous work of ploughing fields and repairing terraces, while groups of women would come together to fertilize and sow fields, transplant rice seedlings, weed the crops, and thresh and winnow the harvest grains. And on many occasions even larger groups of men and women would come together for harvesting crops and carrying straw.

Not all of these group work efforts, however, are for work on the private land of individual families. There are other arrangements that bring together unrelated individuals that cross-cuts caste and ethnic affiliations, and gender, where labor is required for various public works – making repairs to an eroded trail, or to the school or other village office, or for building water taps. In such cases, each household is required to have at least one member assist in such work. While in some cases labor may be required from households in the village at large, more often these are based on residence in wards or even smaller ‘neighborhoods’ (*tol*).

In recent years, a number of more formal groups have been formed in the village. Unlike the informal arrangements associated with *parma*, which may be relatively fluid,

these are relatively more organized, each with a committee (*samiti*) charged with decision-making powers. While theoretically open to all, they tend to draw from a limited number of (privileged) households within the village. For example, the members of the school committee and the Seed Group are made up of only a few of the wealthier, larger landowners, who also happen to be higher caste households. Similarly, the mother's group contains a large number of high-caste, and wealthy, women, the majority of whom are either on a CFUG (or other) committee themselves, or have a spouse (or other household member) who is.

### **Categories of Social Difference**

Despite the remarkable social diversity found in Nepal, both across different geographic-ecological regions and within specific village locales, very few ethnographic accounts (whether by anthropologists or cultural geographers) have adequately written of the heterogeneous nature of village life. The majority of this body of literature has instead tended to write of the various individual ethnic or caste groups, many of whom are the so-called Tibeto-Burman groups of the middle hills, from a 'modernist' ethnographic position (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986). Receiving the most attention have been the Sherpa (Adams 1996; Fisher 1990; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Ortner 1978, 1989; Stevens 1996; Brower 1991), the Thakali (Iijima 1963; 1977; Manzardo 1978; Heide 1988; Fisher 2001; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1966, 1981; Vinding 1998), the Tamang (Fricke 1986; Holmberg 1989), the Gurung (Messerschmidt 1976; Pignede 1966; Macfarlane 1976), the Magar (Fisher 1986; Hitchcock 1966; Molnar 1980, 1981), the Rai and Limbu (Bista 1976; Caplan 1970; Dahal 1985; McDougal 1979), the Newar (Gellner and Quigley 1995; Parish 1996;

Toffin 1977), and the Yolmo (Desjarlais 1992). Receiving far less attention have been the diverse ‘linguistic groups’ inhabiting the low-lying Terai region, groups speaking such languages as Tharu, Danuwar, Dhangar and Satar, Bengali, Maithili and Bhojpuri (located primarily in the eastern half of Nepal) (Bista 1976), as well as the groups living west of the Kali Ghandaki River valley, for example in the areas of *Lo* and *Dolpo* (Bista 1976; Fisher 1986).

As Mary Cameron notes in her study of gender and caste difference in Far Western Nepal, that while the vast majority of ethnographic research is set in communities that are home to members of other ethnic or caste groups, “the relationships between different groups are either tangential to the study or are not involved in the issue of interest” (1998: 14). Notable exceptions to this body of literature are the studies of rural Hindu caste villages by Acharya and Bennett (1981), Bennett (1983), and Gray (1995), Borgstrom (1980), Lionel Caplan (1970, 1974, 1975), Patricia Caplan (1972, 1978), and Maskarinec (1995). The studies by Acharya and Bennett, Bennett, and Gray focus almost exclusively on high-caste families, while the work of Maskarinec focuses on Nepalese shamans, many of whom are low caste. The studies by Borgstrom, Lionel Caplan, and Patricia Caplan provide the most insight into village inter-caste relations. Borgstrom examines the tendency for caste- and land-based patronage relations to thwart democratic and development processes in a village on the southern edge of the Kathmandu valley. Both Lionel Caplan’s (1975) and Patricia Caplan’s (1972) studies address the role caste plays in village politics in far western Nepal, and just as in the case of Cameron’s study, both of the Caplan’s works provide good bases for comparison to the situation found in Manohar regarding patterns of landownership, the lack of a patron-

client system (the *riti-bhagya* system, similar to India's *jajmani* system, as described by Cameron), and the efforts among local political and economic elites to entrench their authority and control over local village affairs.

Another important source regarding the Hindu caste system in Nepal is to be found in the edited volume entitled, *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface* (Fisher 1978). The essays by Patricia Caplan and James Fisher, in challenging the applicability of Dumont's (1980) model of the (Indian) caste system dispel "the conventional view that the caste system and hierarchy are more flexible and shifting in the Himalayas than in the Indian plains" (Cameron 1998; 16), such that the practices of hierarchical domination continue to be reproduced and remain highly important in rural communities (Berreman 1963; Levine 1987). As Cameron points out in her study on caste and gender in far western Nepal, "The necessity to dominate those who are impure, whose position in the caste system is uncertain, appears to be a more significant social force in Nepal's multiethnic rural communities than sanskritization" (1998: 16).

Just as has been the case with polyandry displacing research on other marriage forms and practices in the Himalayas (Berreman 1963), the overemphasis on Nepal's many ethnic groups "have contributed to the false notion that Nepal is a country composed of primarily Buddhist 'tribal' groups" (Cameron 1998: 17). Perhaps more problematic, has been the tendency to situate these sets of groups in isolated contexts, as if they were self-contained and isolated from one another. Similarly, the dichotomization of the region into discrete Hindu and ethnic groupings (with Hindus located at the center socially, and ethnic groups always on the periphery) has been to "view Nepal as involved in a process of Sanskritization, whereby historically isolated tribal societies – as well as

some northern Buddhist groups and the urban Newar – have become increasingly acculturated to Brahmanical caste ideology” (Holmberg 1989: 15; see also Bista 1991; and, Srinivas 1952, 1956). This “Indocentric construction of Nepal,” as Holmberg (1989) calls it, is gradually losing ground thanks to a growing number of detailed ethnographic accounts of multi-ethnic/caste communities (Hitchcock 1978; L. Caplan 1970; Fisher 1986; Levine 1987; Watkins 1996; Cameron 1998), which show “not only that Hindus adopt some of their non-Hindu neighbor’s customs (and violate their own caste codes of conduct) but also that the motivation to become more Hindu-like [to ‘sanskritize’ in Srinivas’s terms] has more to do with political, economic, and marriage concerns than with the conversion to an ideological belief system” (Cameron 1998: 17).

Rather than dismiss aspects of social difference, for example to focus on a discreet ethnic group as has been so common in early anthropological studies in Nepal, I intentionally sought out a multiethnic community in order to explore the ways in which various dimensions of heterogeneity within a local village might be related to the management of local community forests. Inspired by the growing body of literature, broadly defined as political ecology, I have focused on social differentiation among local villagers, particularly the differences mediated by caste and ethnicity, gender, wealth and education, and how these are associated with resource distribution and access among the residents of Manohar. In the remainder of this chapter I outline some of the main characteristics of social difference as found in Manohar. My focus is on examining the nature of heterogeneous communities that form the basis of community forestry in rural villages. In the next chapter, I draw on these features to ask several questions about the implications community forestry has with regard to local social relations.

## Caste and Ethnicity in Manohar

Manohar is a multiethnic village comprised of nine individual caste (*jat*) and ethnic (*jati*) groups representing each of the three main, ranked ritual categories following the varna system as specified in the *Muluki Ain* (Hofer 1979).<sup>57</sup> The highest of these categories are the “twice-born” castes, the “wearers of the holy thread” (*tagadhari*).

Table 6.5 Population of Manohar and District by Caste/Ethnic Group

Caste/ Ethnic Group	Number of Households	Population	% of Total Pop.	District Figures % of Total
<b>“Twice Born” Castes</b>				
Brahmin	53	304	32.83	7.71
Thakuri	27	153	16.74	0
Chhetri	22	155	16.53	17.21 <sup>58</sup>
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>24.92</b>
<b>“Drinking” Castes</b>				
Magar	27	136	14.69	51.14
Thakali	9	45	4.86	1.78
Chantyal	2	5	0.53	3.52
Gurung	0	0	0	0.76
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>20.08</b>	<b>57.20</b>
<b>“Untouchable” Castes</b>				
Sarki	12	76	8.21	2.25
Kami	7	47	5.08	11.49
Damai	1	5	0.53	4.14
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>13.82</b>	<b>17.88</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>160<sup>59</sup></b>	<b>926</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Household survey, 1999

<sup>57</sup> Höfer (1979) provides the most detailed examination of the *Muluki Ain* of 1854. Also see Fürer-Haimendorf (1971), and Levine (1987) for a discussion of caste in Nepal. I have chosen not to discuss at length the number of caste and ethnic groups in the Hindu hierarchy, but rather limit my description to only those castes represented in Manohar.

<sup>58</sup> The figures for the entire district do not include a separate category for Thakuris. I was told by one of the district staff that Thakuris and Chhetris were included together in the same category, although I was not able to verify this.

<sup>59</sup> This number does not include a number of unoccupied households. In some cases these unoccupied households are only temporarily occupied, i.e., during only part of the year as members migrate seasonally between higher and lower elevation dwellings. In other cases, some homes are left vacant while the owners reside either in Beni, the nearby district center, in Pokhara, or in Kathmandu.

Within this category are the Bahuns (or Brahmins) are the highest among these, followed by Thakuris, who claim Rajput ancestry and royal descent, and Chhetris (Table 6.5.). These three high-caste groups are also the largest numerically in terms of the population of Manohar. Bahuns are numerically the largest sub-section of the village, accounting for 32.83% of the total population, nearly as many as the population of Thakuris (16.74%) and Chhetris (16.53%) combined.

The next category in the caste hierarchy are the groups referred to as the “drinking” (*matwali*) castes. Included within this category are the various ‘ethnic’ (or what have also been called “indigenous tribal”) groups that have been absorbed into Nepal’s caste system. These groups are regarded as ritually clean, meaning that they may hire Brahmin priests, and that all other castes will accept water from their hands. The “twice-born” groups, however, will not take ritual foods cooked by members of these castes. Manohar includes only three different groups in this category: Magars, Thakali, and Chantyal.<sup>60</sup>

Placed at the bottom of the hierarchy are the low caste groups variously referred to as “untouchables,” “occupational castes,” and more recently “*dalits*,” who are regarded as “ritually impure.” Members of the two higher categories will not accept food or water from them nor allow them to enter their homes. Despite the abolishment of caste in the recent constitution, and laws to prevent discrimination against lower castes, much of the traditional behaviors and prohibitions surrounding interaction between the castes appear

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<sup>60</sup> I have chosen to assign Chantyal to a separate ethnic grouping, rather than include them in the Magar category, since the Chantyal I spoke with do not consider themselves to be Magar, and have a distinct language which differs from the Magar language (Magar basha). In an era of ethnic revival/resurgence, these ploys for self distinction are increasing in frequency.



to have changed little in village settings. The Bahun couple who ran a small shop in Manohar, for example, never exchanged cash or goods directly by hand with lower caste customers. Lower caste customers would instead remain outside the shop doors, place their money on the ground before them and pick up their purchase. Unlike many other customers from other castes who would enter the small shop when purchasing goods, low caste members would merely stand at the entrance.

Table 6.6. Population by Ward

Caste/Ethnic Group	Ward 1 (%)	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5
Brahmin	141	29	48	65	20
Thakuri		51	97	5	0
Chhetri	16	49	17	66	7
	<b>157</b> <b>(100)</b>	<b>129</b> <b>(61.1)</b>	<b>162</b> <b>(81.4)</b>	<b>136</b> <b>(63.8)</b>	<b>27</b> <b>(18.6)</b>
Magar	0	16	8	53	65
Thakali	0	3	7	24	6
Chantyal	0	2	2	0	0
	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b> <b>(10.0)</b>	<b>17</b> <b>(8.5)</b>	<b>77</b> <b>(36.2)</b>	<b>71</b> <b>(49.0)</b>
Sarki	0	56	20	0	0
Kami	0	0	0	0	47
Damai	0	5	0	0	0
	<b>0</b>	<b>61</b> <b>(28.9)</b>	<b>20</b> <b>(10.1)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>47</b> <b>(32.4)</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>145</b>

Source: Household survey, 1999

Table 6.6 shows the number of households and population of the village according to caste and the percentage of the total village population. Individual castes and ethnic groups are listed according to their rank in the caste hierarchy. There are 9 caste/ethnic groups represented in the village (Table 6.6). High castes are clearly the most represented, with Brahmins amounting to approximately one-third of the total population, and nearly twice as more populace as the next caste. In terms of the

distribution of the various caste and ethnic groups within the village, a number of the groups are located in small clusters and located in only one or two of the wards in Manohar (Table 6.6; Figure 6.1).

### **Literacy and Education:**

Opposite the small shop above which I lived during my stay in Manohar, was Deepak School, the main school in Manohar drawing children between the ages of five and fourteen. The five teachers, three men and two women, teach grades one through eight. Literacy rates in Nepal have always been extremely low; the national average is reportedly 59.6% for males and 24% for females. These figures conceal the tremendous disparity between urban centers and rural areas. Compared to major towns and cities, rural villages have much lower rates of literacy, a fact that is confirmed in Manohar (Table 6.7): for example, males (82.7%) have a higher literacy rate than females (35.3%).

Table 6.7. Literacy rates by Age and Gender in Manohar

<b>Gender &amp; Age Groups</b>	<b>No. Literate (%)</b>	<b>No. Illiterate (%)</b>
<b>Males 50+</b>	35 (44.9)	43 (55.1)
<b>Males 40-49</b>	32 (80.0)	8 (20)
<b>Males 30-39</b>	37 (80.4)	9 (19.6)
<b>Males 18-29</b>	113 (95.8)	5 (4.2)
<b>Adult Males Only</b>	217 (77)	65 (23)
<b>Males &lt;18</b>	123 (95.3)	6 (4.7)
<b>Total Males</b>	340 (82.7)	71 (17.3)
<b>Females 50+</b>	1 (1.6)	61 (98.4)
<b>Females 40-49</b>	9 (18)	41 (82)
<b>Females 30-39</b>	19 (37.3)	32 (62.7)
<b>Females 18-29</b>	62 (65.3)	33 (34.7)
<b>Adult Females Only</b>	91 (35.3)	167 (64.7)
<b>Females &lt;18</b>	123 (89.1)	15 (10.9)
<b>Total Females</b>	214 (54)	182 (46)

Source: Household survey, 1999

Table 6.8. Literacy rates by Caste and Gender in Manohar

Caste/Ethnic Group	Gender	No (%) Lit	% of Total per group	No. (%) Ill.	% of Total per group
Brahmin	Female	80 (60.6)		52 (39.4)	
	Male	108(83.7)		21 (16.3)	
			188 (71.5)		73 (28.5)
Thakuri	Female	41 (62.1)		25 (37.9)	
	Male	64 (87.7)		9 (12.3)	
			105 (75.5)		34 (24.5)
Chhetri	Female	27 (46.6)		31 (53.4)	
	Male	63 (78.8)		17 (21.2)	
			100 (67.6)		48 (32.4)
Magar	Female	39 (54.9)		32 (45.1)	
	Male	45 (86.5)		7 (13.5)	
			84 (68.3)		39 (31.7)
Thakali	Female	11 (61.1)		7 (38.9)	
	Male	22 (95.7)		1 (4.3)	
			33 (80.5)		8 (19.5)
Chantyal	Female	1 (50)		1 (50)	
	Male	2 (100)		0 (0)	
			3 (75)		1 (25)
Sarki	Female	8 (28.6)		20 (71.4)	
	Male	22 (68.8)		10 (31.2)	
			30 (50)		30 (50)
Kami	Female	6 (33.3)		12 (66.7)	
	Male	14 (73.7)		5 (26.3)	
			20 (54.1)		17 (45.9)
Damai	Female	0 (0)		2 (100)	
	Male	1 (50)		1 (50)	
			1 (25)		3 (75)
		544 (68.6)		253 (31.4)	

Source: Household survey, 1999

Perhaps more striking than the disparity between men and women is the disparity between young and old, especially in terms of gender (Table 6.7) and the differences among different caste and ethnic groups (Table 6.8).<sup>61</sup> Among men and women the rates for those over 50 years of age is far less than for other age categories, although for men the rates are still higher than the overall average for all women. There is only a slight

<sup>61</sup> The data on literacy was collected during my household census of Manohar. Residents were asked about their level of school education. Since many adults have not attended school, they were asked whether they could read as well as write a letter – which is a common basis for assessing literacy in Nepal.

trend among the different age categories for males, except for males 50 and older, which have a rate of only 44.9%. The trend among women is much more pronounced. Females under 18 (89.1%) have a significantly higher rate than do adult women (35.3%), and is only slightly less than that of young men of the same age (95.3%). Among adult women, however, there is an inverse relationship between age and literacy; as the categories increase in age, literacy rates decrease markedly. Among the 62 women over 50 in Manohar, only one is literate. These patterns in literacy reflect a number of contributing factors; the traditional division of labor, marriage practices, availability of local schools, greater family incomes, and changing attitudes about educating girls.

### **The Management of Forests in Manohar**

Within the village of Manohar, there are three community forestry user groups, the Okhle CFUG, Ghatte Khola CFUG, and Manohar Mandir CFUG, each with its own community forest, operational plan, and group membership. While not fundamentally different in terms of their overall management and use of the forest, each of the user groups do have differences in terms of the availability of forest products for harvest, the amounts available, and the fees charged for the products.

#### **Okhle CFUG**

The Okhle community forest is located in the upper section Ward 1. This is the oldest of the three user groups in Manohar, though the forest this user group is managing is both the youngest and, covering an area of only 6 hectares, the smallest of the three. The history of the forest was told to me by the user group's committee chair and secretary, Ram Chandra Sharma and Leela Dar Sharma. What had once been a dense forest of more than 100 hectares, had almost completely disappeared by the late 1970s,

just prior to the USAID-funded Resource Conservation and Utilization Project's (RCUP) construction of offices for soil conservation, veterinary services, and forests (Figure 6.5). I asked, "What had caused so much forest loss?" Ram Chandra Sharma explained that this was due to population growth and encroachment on the forest for agricultural land, as well as the overexploitation of the forest for increased demands for products. He continued:

Then in 2042/43 (1986) we went to the RCUP and asked for a plantation. For a few years the plantation area was protected by a forest watcher (*ban heraalu*) provided by RCUP. Then all the users began to protect the forest by collecting money for a forest watcher. Every year we users do work together to conserve this area, to repair the wall. Now the forest has returned and we now have many *utis* [alders, *Alnus*] and *sallaa* [pines, *Pinus*], and many wild animals have come. We, all the forest users, are now united, and promised to conserve the forest so that it will be our community forest.

In 1993, forest rangers from Beni met with Ram Chandra Sharma, who was at the time the Ward 1 President, to begin the process of forming a community forestry user group. A year later, the management plan was approved by the District Forest Officer and the Okhle CFUG was given management responsibility for their forest.

Even though the Okhle community forest is now a relatively dense, closed canopy forest, with only 6 hectares of forest area it is too small to provide sufficient amounts of grass, fuelwood, forage, timber and fodder for the 38 households that compose the group. Access to the forest is opened for a limited period of time for each product individually, with each product also requiring a small collection fee. The availability of ground grass (*ghaans*) is based on a rotational plot system, each household being assigned its own plot for a fee of Rs. 20, and is open for collection from *asoj* (mid-September to mid-October) through to the end of *mangsir* (mid-November to mid-December). Dried fuelwood (dead

branches) is available in *push* (mid-December to mid-January) and *magh* (mid-January to mid-February) for a fee of Rs. 10 per *bhari* (headload). Forage (*sottar*) is available from *phagun* (mid-February to mid-March) to *jeth* (mid-May to mid-June) for Rs. 5 per *bhari*. Neither timber (*kaath*) nor fodder (green twigs with leaves, *ghaans paat*) is available for collection from this forest.



Figure 6.6. Abandoned RCUP buildings and present Okhle CFUG office.

### **Manohar Mandir CFUG**

The Manohar Mandir community forest is a robust forest covering approximately 85 hectares, and is located along the lower portion of the hillside in Wards 1, 2, and 3. This is the most recently formed user group in Manohar, and only received formal responsibility in the spring of 2000. The Manohar Mandir CFUG also has the largest

number of households of the three user groups with 112, drawing members from Wards 1, 2, and 3.<sup>62</sup>

The Manohar Mandir community forest has been the site of a dispute involving a large area of land given a *birta* land grant (the details of which will be discussed further in Chapter 7). The King of Nepal gave the *birta* grant to the local Thakuri raja in 1822. The *birta* grant was subsequently passed down to the *raja*'s descendents that today comprise a collection of eleven patrilineally-related families residing in Wards 3 and 4. Despite the Private Forest Nationalization Act, 1957 (when all *birta* lands were to be nationalized) these related families retained control over the forestland up until it was 'handed-over' to the community for a community forest.

The Manohar Mandir CFUG allows open access to the forest for 15 days during the months of *push* (mid-December to mid-January) and *magh* (mid-January to mid-February). During this time the members of the user group can collect dry fuelwood free of charge. Members can also request permission to collect fuelwood during *jeth* (mid-May to mid-June), *bhaddau* (mid-August to mid-September), and *asoj* (mid-September to mid-October), paying a fee of Rs. 5, 10, or 15 per *bhari*, depending on the distance of the household from the forest – more distant households paying Rs. 5, while the nearest households to the forest are charged Rs. 15 per *bhari*. Grass (*ghaans*) and leaves (*ghaans paat*) are available from *asar* to *asoj*, and is based on assigned plots, costing each

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<sup>62</sup> The number of the households included in the Manohar Mandir and Ghatte Khola user groups exceeds the number of households in my household survey. In the case of the Manohar Mandir user group, it includes 'households' whose families are not currently resident in the village. The case with the Ghatte Khola user group is similar, with several members temporarily living elsewhere, but also includes households that have since moved from the village permanently and in three cases still includes individuals who are now deceased.

household Rs. 20. Forage (*sottar*) is available for free during *asar* (mid-June to mid-July) and *saun* (mid-July to mid-August).

### **Ghatte Khola CFUG**

According to villagers accounts, prior to the formation of the Ghatte Khola CFUG, a relatively large, though degraded forest covered much of the area covering Wards 4 and 5. Gradually, under the pressure of population growth and settlement in the village, much of the more fertile and accessible forest area was converted to private agricultural land. By the 1960s, the remaining forest area, which is now the community forest, was under the control of the district forest officer located in Beni. Because villagers were required to get permission from the District Forest Officer in Beni, and later in the 1980s, from the *pradhan panch*, the incidence of ‘stealing’ fuelwood and other products from the forest was quite high. In 1994 (2050), the Ghatte Khola CFUG was officially formed to manage approximately 58 hectares of forest located in the lower area of Wards 4 and 5 (and contiguous with the Manohar Mandir community forest). Since the hand-over of the forest, its condition and the availability of products has increased, although villagers still express concern over access to fodder and fuelwood from the forest.

Within the user group there a total of 76 households, 73 from Wards 4 and 5 and 3 households from Ward 3. Similar to their counterparts, the Okhle and Manohar Mandir CFUGs, access to the forest for forest products varies seasonally and requires a nominal fee: fuelwood and fodder are available during *pūs* (mid-December to mid-January) and *magh* (mid-January to mid-February) at a cost of Rs 5-20 per headload, and additional fuelwood may also be collected during *jeth* (mid-May to mid-June).



## **Summary**

In this chapter I have briefly described some of the main features of village life in Manohar. Unlike most ethnographic accounts, my concern has been to expose, rather than efface, some of the many aspects of social difference that characterize village life in Manohar. While caste and ethnic membership provide an important starting point, gender, education, and land ownership (and other bases of wealth) are especially salient features. The importance that these points of social difference have in terms of the day-to-day functioning of forest use and management are examined in the subsequent chapter.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL DIFFERENCE IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY**

The shift within community forestry policy in Nepal, from a “forest-centered to a people-centered” focus (Gilmour and Fisher 1990), has opened a space for several social issues, such as equity, participation, and others, to be addressed. This has led to new discussions about what community forestry is, who should be involved, and who should benefit. It has also led to a retooling of donor-assisted and government-sponsored community forestry projects in order to sensitize themselves, as well as communities, to gender and other kinds of social difference that may be connected to various forms of inequality. Nevertheless, while these issues have been easily enveloped by the community forestry discourse, little critical reflection has been devoted to the implications they have had on community forestry as practiced within ‘communities’.

In previous chapters I have made efforts to question or problematize many of the conventional approaches taken in examining development and community forestry. ‘Decentralization,’ ‘democracy,’ ‘participation,’ ‘planning,’ and others were scrutinized in Chapter 5 for their role in providing a basis for greater centralized control by the state. In Chapter 6, I highlighted the heterogeneous character of village life in Manohar. In this chapter I turn to examine how these various aspects of social difference affect the outcome of community forestry within the very ‘communities’ charged with forest management responsibility.

In problematizing the way in which the concept of ‘community’ is deployed in community forestry, I ask a series of questions intended to reveal the extent to which the principles of ‘equality’ and ‘equity,’ ‘participation,’ and representation are manifest. I ask: What does *community*-based forest management mean in the context of a multiethnic, heterogeneous social context? In what ways, if any, are the effects of community-based forest management distributed unevenly across caste and ethnic groups and other important social categories? What are some of the important social categories that serve to separate the political elite from the rest of the community, and how do these affect the management of forests and the distribution of benefits? Who within the ‘community’ benefits through community-based forest management, and how? How are benefits defined? Do all of the members of the community have the same access to these benefits?

### **Interrogating Key Concepts**

*One man’s imagined community is another man’s political prison.*

Arjun Appadurai (1990: 295)

‘Community,’ like so many of the other “diasporic terms” (Brosius et al. 1998) that circulate through the literature on community-based conservation and resource management, defies easy definition. Much of the early literature on community-based conservation has been devoted to arguing that communities are central to renewable resource management. Seldom, however, was much attention devoted to examining the socio-political nature of communities, or how the manner in which ‘community’ is envisaged and written into projects may actually affect the outcome(s) of the policy changes and programs being proposed. A number of writers, among them Tania Li

(1992) and Arun Agrawal (1997; see also Agrawal & Gibson 1999), from whom I draw heavily, have questioned the uncritical valorization and usage of ‘community,’ particularly within the context of ‘community-based’ programs. This literature shares concerns with research under the umbrella term ‘political ecology’. While diverse in scope and in terms of specific emphases, political ecologists do tend to share a number of broad concerns, especially the significance of various dimensions of social difference in shaping access to resources. Political relations in particular, whether at the level of the state or in terms of micro-politics, occupy a central focus among these researchers. However, political ecologists themselves have not been immune to critique and have been challenged for paying too much attention to politics and too little to ecology (Vayda & Waters 1998). Notwithstanding this (over-) emphasis, political ecologists have been instrumental for emphasizing the importance of articulating some of the critical dimensions of social difference as they affect access to resources.

Anthropologists have been easy prey for critiques demonstrating the manner in which many theoretical approaches (e.g., neo-functionalism and structuralism) have fostered, produced, and/or promoted visions of ‘community’ as static and rule bound. In such instances, the emphasis has been on the integration of aspects of society into a harmonious whole. An example are equilibrium models that imply a timeless quality to communities and cultures. A corollary of these images is that in cases where it is realized that these communities contain conflicts and disputes of various kinds (for example, over access to valuable and strategic resources), it is assumed that the ‘community’ (as shared and consensual) inevitably breaks down; in the context of resource management, management systems break down, leading to and causing resource degradation - as in

Hardin's (1968) "tragedy of the commons" discourse (see also Feeney et al. 1990; McCay & Acheson 1990). Such images or constructions, however, obscure the complexity of "change in the making," of the way in which individual (and/or small groups) negotiate their way through and around incidents involving contestation and dispute to find agreement, to make compromises, to solve disputes or even foster them to enact changes (Leach et al. 1997). What such a view fails to realize is that rules and practices of resource access and control are always (or very nearly always) contested, whether in terms of relations in the 'community' (at the local level) and between the 'community' and national government (local-national relations).

"Conceptually and sociologically, community refers to a bundle of concepts related to space, size, composition, interactions, interests, and objectives" (Agrawal 1997: 15). Much of the current literature on conservation and resource use tends to envisage 'community' in one of three ways: community as a spatial unit, as a social structure, and as a set of shared norms. In this chapter, I will concentrate on the problems of conceptualizing community as a homogeneous social structure. Typically, community is assumed to be a group of similar households (in terms of assets and incomes) with common characteristics - in terms of ethnicity, religion, caste, or language. According to a substantial body of literature on natural resource management and common property, such homogeneity is believed to be the foundation of cooperative solutions, reducing hierarchical and conflict-ridden interactions, and overall, is necessary to promote better resource management (Netting 1972, 1978, 1982, McCay and Acheson 1990; Ostrom 1990) The notion that community is homogeneous also meshes well with beliefs about its spatial boundaries. Communities, as local sites, are where people live together

following similar occupations, depend on the same resources, use the same language, and belong to the same ethnic or religious group (Agrawal 1997: 17-18). However, even if members of a group, such as a community forestry user group, are similar in several respects, few studies wrestle with the difficulty of operationalizing social homogeneity.

At one level, ‘community,’ as small and integrated, has served as a powerful tool to contest centralized control of forests. Tania Li, in her article entitled “Images of Community,” speaks of how “idealized visions of community, indigenous, traditional,... are being ‘valorized by development discourses’” (1996: 502). As David Korten notes, community-based programs are often a means “to alter policies in order to ‘create enabling settings’ in which community-based resource management can occur, *whether or not* it already exists as a reality in particular settings” (1986:4). In other words, community-based programs are a means to redress the neglect given local people and thereby enhance the resource rights and livelihood security (among other things) of the “community”.

In the ever-changing discourse(s) of community-based management, concepts such as ‘community’ are also being used to confer an aura of authority on minority cultures, or ‘local communities,’ and are often used to assert the authenticity of local management practices. As Tania Li (1996) illustrates, these terms are deployed to build images of coherent, long-standing, localized sources of authority tied to what are assumed to be intrinsically sustainable resource management regimes. A very large body of research has been written on ‘indigenous’ or ‘traditional’ resource management in Nepal (Gilmour 1989; Gilmour & Fisher 1991; Molnar 1981; Messerschmidt 1987, 1995), as well as wildlife and other natural resources in Asia, Africa, and Latin America

(Brokensha et al. 1980; Brokensha 1987; Messerschmidt 1993; Western & Wright 1994). Li also argues convincingly of the links between the discourse of policy interventions that seek to link ‘sustainable development’ to particular strategic representations of ‘community’ stressing harmony, equality and tradition. Furthermore, idealized visions of ‘community’ “continue to occupy a prominent place in the discourse of social change and development” (Li 1996: 503). Such visions emphasize rural communities that are in harmony with the environment and engaged in sustainable and equitable use of resources. Moreover, ‘communities’ are being naturalized - that is, equated with “natural units” - and envisioned as embodying values of cooperation and self-reliance (Li 1996). However, no such “natural units” exist in community forestry any more than they do in other common property or resource management contexts. Heeding Appadurai’s (1999) comments about the ‘local,’ it is perhaps best to view ‘community’ as a project than as a self-apparent given. In other words, the manner in which ‘community’ is defined and deployed is contingent on the context within which it is used, by whom, and for what specific ends.

The case with Nepal’s Community Forestry Program illustrates the value of approaching ‘community’ from this critical perspective; the ‘community’ as a (user) group is juxtaposed to the state, and privileged as an invaluable, and even ‘natural,’ source for conserving Nepal’s valuable forests, whether or not indigenous or traditional institutions are already in place at the ‘community’ level. Community forestry policy also explicitly aims to address imbalances *within* communities; to address inequality in access to resources, empower women and others, through greater ‘participation’ for example. Despite these policy prescriptions, the general usage of ‘community’ in

community forestry tends to portray the ‘community’ as a “unified, organic whole,” and as such fails to attend to differences within communities, such as those elaborated in Chapter 6. Community forestry, then, tends to display a marked degree of ambivalence regarding the notion of ‘community’; at times attentive to differences within communities, and at other times neglecting such differences, especially those that may critically affect resource management outcomes - the politics of distribution, access, and participation. Yet, as Agrawal argues, “attention to these details is absolutely critical if changes in policy on behalf of community are to lead to outcomes that are sustainable and/or equitable” (1997: 15).

The genericized ‘communities’ that are produced in this manner are merely “ideal types, unlocated in time or space” (Li 1996: 504). As Li rightly points out, there is an important role for generalized representations of ‘communities,’ in that they open up a space for policy shifts and new program directions, such as those witnessed with the emergence of community forestry. ‘Community’ may serve as a strategic ploy (or strategic juxtaposition) to wrestle with the interests of the state, and to privilege the needs, interests, and abilities of ‘communities’ to manage and use local forests. Agrawal reminds us, however, that generalized representations are also misrepresentations (1997: 14). Such “idealized images of community,” Li also points out, “are equally capable of doing damage when translated into more specific policy recommendations” (1996: 505). Within Nepal’s context of diversity, what is most important about this is that these “idealized images” tend to (unavoidably) disguise, conceal, eclipse, and erase critical interests, processes, and causal links within communities, and even between communities and other social formations (Agrawal 1997: 14). Agrawal goes on to argue that it is only



by exploring their specifics and questioning them closely, that it becomes possible to point toward more equitable, perhaps more efficient, avenues of conservation even as communities continue to occupy center stage. Advocates of community, even if they recognize these issues, need to highlight them, and need to incorporate them in policy and practice.

Melissa Leach emphasizes, however, that we cannot (nor should not) avoid the “central question of who is enabled or constrained: whose economic circumstances or security of tenure is at stake?” (1991: 18). Li also points out, that while ‘indigenous,’ ‘tribal,’ ‘local,’ or ‘traditional’ communities are potentially privileged by the discourse of ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ ‘community’ property rights, other groups (even resident in the local area, or ‘community’), perhaps equally poor and deserving, may be disadvantaged” (1996: 505). We as anthropologists are finally beginning to emphasize in our research and writing, all human groups are stratified to some extent. As many writers now argue it is more important than ever to analyze the degrees and types of heterogeneity, and those dimensions of it that are important for resource conservation. This is precisely why political ecologists have felt the need to highlight social difference and micro-politics (Nazarea-Sandoval 1995a, 1995b; Moore 1996; Agrawal 1997; Li 1996; Leach et al 1997; see also the edited volume by Peet & Watts 1996), and thus frequently ask , what, or who, exactly is the community? How does social difference affect access to resources?

Thus an important starting point is to explore the multiple dimensions of heterogeneity where they arise within community groups, without disregarding the important aspects of similarity, unity, and shared interests that draw together and

maintain ‘communities’ in the first place. Such a position considers all communities to be heterogeneous, at the very least in terms of wealth, education, age, and gender, even the most basic village comprised of a single caste or ethnic group, (but does not rule out the equally important aspects of sameness) . My primary concern here, however, is that the notion of ‘community’ may obscure crucial aspects of social difference that may cast the members of the ‘community’ in generic terms, as if they all possessed the same interests, goals, needs, abilities, educational and financial background and/or opportunities. This is a concern because it compromises the success of community forestry for the intended beneficiaries. Community forestry policy dictates that the program is meant to benefit some (poor, landless, disadvantaged, women) more than others (rich, landowners, privileged, men). Community forestry, is thus, premised on the realization, or ‘social fact,’ that ‘communities’ in Nepal are by their nature heterogeneous. My aim, then, is to foreground the importance of social difference, although without discarding the value that ‘community’ still serves at the larger level (i.e., juxtaposed to the state).

In Manohar there are several striking, and alarming, trends that reveal the seriousness of a failure to differentiate among the members of the ‘community’. These trends, I would also contend, are not unique to this site either, but seem to be endemic to Nepal’s community forestry efforts, if not also the efforts of other community-based resource management programs elsewhere. In this chapter, I focus on differences along lines of caste/ethnicity, education, wealth and gender as they intersect within community forestry management in an effort to demonstrate how sites of difference can have serious implications on the distribution of power within the workings of community forestry.

Furthermore, examining the processes and institutions through which resources are managed focuses attention squarely on the negotiation of differences and on how decisions (even when they are made ‘collectively’ by communities) are “often imposed on those whose voices are softer and whose hands are weaker” (Agrawal 1997: 18).

### **Meeting the “Community” in Community Forestry**

On the surface of things, community forestry claims to hand-over management authority and responsibilities to the local community, or more precisely, to those members who constitute the respective user groups. In the case of Manohar, this means the various members of the Ghatte Khola CFUG, the Manohar Mandir CFUG, and the Okhle CFUG. In Chapter 6 I briefly outlined the basic features of these user groups’ management practices and rules regarding access to forests. Within each of these user groups, every member is granted the same access to the forest and its products as any other member, provided they pay for the required product or general ‘access’ fee. Looking past the rules and regulations of management plans, to take a closer examination of the universality of access to forest products, provides a much different picture with regard to the practices and outcome(s) of *community* forestry.

Several studies of community forestry have reported on the tendency for a bias to emerge in terms of caste and gender composition of user groups and committees (see Graner 1997; Karki et al. 1994; Chhetri and Panday 1992; Messerschmidt 1995b; SDC 1995; Khadka 1999; Moffatt 1998). Indeed, this is one of the well-worn complaints made among project staff of the functioning of user groups; “domination [over-representation] of high-caste men is the most serious problem of community forestry”. Many of the first CFUGs formed in Nepal included only high-castes. In many other

cases, where high- and low-castes were included together, groups were often sub-divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary sub-groups, each with different access rights, though, it should be added, with equal forest management obligations (i.e., contributing labor for silvicultural operations). The situation with women has followed a similar trend. During the early phases of implementation there was a systematic bias against including any consideration or provisions that would incorporate women's contributions in the use and management of forests (SDC 1995; Khadka 1999; Moffatt 1998). Since then projects have proceeded on a massive campaign to correct the "gender imbalance" and "mainstream gender equity" (UNDP n.d.). Yet, several of the District Forest Office and community forestry project staff I interviewed about high-caste and gender inequality were ambivalent about it as a 'problem'. They are quick to admit that while this may have been a common occurrence in the first few years of community forestry implementation, it is much less common today. The general consensus seems to be that this situation has abated; all forest users, regardless of caste, ethnicity, or gender are included in the user groups.

The evidence from Manohar would seem to support this claim. However, membership in the user group is not necessarily an accurate barometer of access to the distribution of benefits or involvement in community forestry. Where key patterns of difference do emerge is with respect to 'forest use' as compared to 'forest management,' as well as membership in CFUG committees, where decisions about forest management and access are ultimately made and enforced.

## Forest Use

As discussed in Chapter 6, there is a gendered division of labor when it comes to the collection of forest products in Manohar. The lion's share of the labor devoted to the collection of fodder and fuelwood (of primarily dry branches) is done by women. This is confirmed by numerous studies and reports documenting women's contributions. In the Swiss Development Cooperation's (SDC) report entitled *A Gender Analysis*, in Nepal, "women collect 84% of fuelwood and carry several tones of fodder for each buffalo every year" (1995: 8). This figure seems a somewhat inflated based on my own observations and the respondents of the forest use survey I conducted: out of a total of 160 households, 98 (61.3%) said women were the main collectors of forest products (fuelwood and fodder); 53 (33.1%) said collection was by men and women, both; and, 9 (5.6%) responded that men were the primary collectors (6 of these households were headed by a widower). Even within the households, much of this work is also done by younger women, and when there is a daughter-in-law, she is often given this work – as well as some of the other more difficult duties, e.g., carrying water, cleaning out the livestock *goth* (cowshed). The tendency then, based on a traditional division of labor, is usually for women, and often junior women, in the household to be the "primary users" of forest products.

In terms of reliance on forest products from the community forest, those families who have own very little land (Table 6.2), and who have an insufficient supply of food (Table 6.3), often lack sufficient numbers of tress (if any) on their private land to support their fuelwood and fodder needs, or those for other forest products. It is these households who are most reliant on their local community forest, and this ostensibly has been one of

the main objectives of community forestry policy; “to provide women, the poor, and landless – those who rely on the forest” (HMG 1991, 1992) with access rights to community forests. These are the families who, before community forestry, had to rely on the good grace of the District Forest Officer, or village *pradhan panch*, to be able to collect products from the (“national”) forest without having to ‘steal’ the products. Wealthier, larger landowners with privately owned trees seldom ‘used the forest’. Now, following the handover of forests, all the members of the user groups satisfy their product needs from the community forest, though not all ‘rely’ on it. I will return to discuss the significance of these patterns of use after discussing the labor obligations involved in forest management activities.

### **Forest Management**

The “management of forests” generally refers to two sets of arrangements; a set of ‘institutional’ arrangements and a set of ‘technical’ arrangements (Fisher 1990; Gilmour & Fisher 1991). In the former case, the ‘institutional arrangements’ are the procedures, practices, rules and regulations surrounding the management of the *users* of the forests; how access and availability of resources is defined, including prevention of fire and protection from grazing, and the organizational practices of user groups. In terms of the management of forest resources, the ‘technical arrangements’ are the silvicultural operations involved in the restoration, regeneration, and maintenance of *forests*. Although these operations can be quite technical, in terms of what is expected of user groups and as written in their operational plans, this generally involves such simple activities as removal of weeds and unwanted species, maintenance of ground cover,

singling, pruning, and thinning existing trees, planting and maintaining seedlings and nurseries, etc.

The work involved in carrying out these silvicultural operations, although seldom done more than once or twice a year, requires the input of at least one person from each member household in the user group. Here I found that there were relatively equal numbers of men and women engaged in this work. Villagers also reported that there was no preference for either men or women to do this work; “whoever is available for such work comes” the Ghatte Khola committee secretary told me. The only slight difference was when cutting and removing large trees were involved; in such cases this work was typically conducted by men. Otherwise, women were as equally involved in such work. However, within the household there was a pattern of seniority that emerged; again, junior members of the household were usually engaged in fulfilling these corvée labor obligations.

### **Membership in *Community Forestry***

Membership in either of the community forestry user groups in Manohar is nearly universal.<sup>63</sup> There is no discrimination based on caste or ethnic group membership. Some households are also members of more than one community forest users group: here there is no apparent pattern either. Where there is a noticeable difference within ‘communities’ is when it comes to ‘participation’. ‘Participation,’ as I have already

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<sup>63</sup> The only exceptions to this, are five households in ward 5, located on the boundary of Manohar and Jhi VDCs. Three of these households are related to families in Jhi, and built their homes when that area was part of Jhi VDC in the 1980s. The other two households are only very recent residents in Manohar, are low caste families only renting their homes, and have arrived in village after the formation of the Ghatte Khola CFUG. Though not ‘formal’ members of the user group, they are still allowed to collect products from the community forestry, and pay the same fees for products as formal members.

discussed in Chapter 5, is just one of many problematic concepts deployed in development discourse. If ‘participation’ as used in development discourse requires interrogation, it is also necessary to consider the way(s) in which ‘to participate’ (*bhaag linu*) is typically understood among villagers. To ‘participate,’ or to ‘take part’ as it is literally translated into Nepali (*linu* = to take; *bhaag* = part), is generally synonymous with one’s attendance at some function, and does not necessarily mean that the individual in question does anything while they attend. When I asked both men and women, “Do you participate in community forest management?” and “Do you participate in community forestry meetings?,” I seldom received a negative answer. The replies I received made sense in terms of my descriptions of forest use and various management activities. In this respect, nearly every household could be said to be ‘participating’ in the use and management activities. However, this is much less the case where committee and general group meetings are concerned.

When we consider the patterns of membership and ‘participation’ within user group committee meetings a clear distinction emerges with respect to those who are the users and those who ‘really manage’ the forests. Community forestry legislation mandates that 30% of committee membership is to be reserved for women and individuals from disadvantaged groups (lower castes, poor, landless). This legislation, or what we might also read as ‘forced participation’ of members of these categories onto committees is the result of dismal figures regarding the composition of committees during the early years of user group formation, and is obviously related to the problems affecting more general user group membership discussed above. This mandate, however, naively assumes that members of such groups will be included in the committees, and



that this membership in the committee will translates directly into ‘participation’ – in the sense of being actively engaged in management decisions. Evidence from the user group meetings I observed in Manohar (and during visits with other CFUGs) suggests that these individuals are rarely actively involved, whether this means making decisions, suggestions, or even contributing to the discussions.



Figure 7.1. Ghatte Khola CFUG committee meeting

Very simple observations of several committee meetings and general assemblies are enough to recognize disparities in ‘participation’. To begin with, the seating arrangement during large assemblies and even the small committee meetings (Figures 7.1., 7.2., 7.3.) illustrates the degree of inequality among the members (in terms of gender or caste), and closely corresponds with whether certain individuals actually do anything in the meeting other than attend. Men and women are typically seated apart from one another, with women often on or outside the perimeter of a circle of men (as in Figures

7.1 and 7.3). In several cases, women often do not even attend the meetings, and on many occasions are not even told about the time and location of the meeting. Sita Sharma, one of two women on the Okhle CFUG committee and the sister-in-law of the committee chair, told me of how she was coerced into becoming one of the female members of the committee.

One day the forest ranger from Galeshor came and requested that I be on the committee. He said they needed a woman. But I was not willing to be a member of the forest user group committee. Then a member of the committee came to my house in the evening. ‘No men are in your house,’ they said to me and made me sign the register... I can’t read or write, even I can’t write my name, but what can I do?

When I asked her about her ‘participation’ in meetings, she told me that she rarely goes to the meetings, and had not been to a meeting in as many as four or five months. “They do not call very many meetings,” she told me. And yet, I met Sita only ten days after I had attended an Okhle committee meeting. The other woman in the committee, Devi Sharma, was also not in attendance at that meeting, or the other two that I observed over the next 3 months. “There is only my daughter and myself in my home,” Sita told me, “so I have to do much work. It is not always possible to go to the meetings.”

The situation with Saraswati Malla provides another striking example of women’s inclusion in user group committees. Married to Tika Malla, an officer in Indian Army, Saraswati and her husband are among the more prosperous families in Manohar. Additionally, Saraswati is one of the few women of her age who are literate. For these reasons, and no doubt because of her affable personality, she was persuaded to be a member of not one but two CFUG committees, the Ghatte Khola committee and the

Manohar Mandir committee.<sup>64</sup> When I asked her why she is on both committees, she told me, “I don’t know why they called me... because they needed to make the quota [of the required number of women]. I don’t know anything about such forest matters. I know none of these things.” Smiling, she added, “I go to the meetings and sit but do nothing... say nothing. I am like a *laato* (half wit, mentally disabled)”.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 7.2. Manohar Mandir CFUG committee meeting

Notwithstanding, Saraswati’s self-deprecating remarks, she is far from ignorant, and one of the more influential women in Manohar. Besides serving on two CFUG committees, she is a (political) representative for Ward 3. She is also the chairwoman of

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<sup>64</sup> Saraswati Malla’s household is one of a few households from ward 3 that are members of the Ghatte Khola community forestry user group.

<sup>65</sup> This was a term Saraswati affectionately used to tease me with about my language skills when I first began living in the village. We spent many hours seated in her kitchen, drinking tea, eating an afternoon snack, while she teased me mercilessly, but helped me with my vocabulary.

a newly formed ‘mother’s group’ (*aamaa samuha*) in Manohar, whose activities include trying to stop alcohol consumption among men, domestic abuse, and helping organize for various development-related activities such as an adult literacy program for women in the village. Saraswati is among the most prominent women in the village, ‘politically’ or otherwise, and in the nine committee meetings I attended (among both the Manohar Mandir and Ghatte Khola committees), not on a single occasion did she (nor any other woman) volunteer her opinion during the meetings. In villagers’ eyes she ‘participated’ in, *attended*, the meeting, but was not ‘active’. And as I have already indicated, women are often not even informed of meetings (as in the Manohar Mandir committee meeting, Figure 7.2).



Figure 7.3. Manohar village health committee meeting

What are some of the reasons for women’s lack of ‘participation’ in meetings?

The dominant narrative of women’s lack of ‘participation’ tends to situate the blame on

the characteristics of women; women are shy, are not as knowledgeable about forests, and are generally lacking when it comes to an education. Men in Manohar echo many of these explanations; “women do not come forward”; “they are too busy doing housework”. Saraswati Malla’s comments above would seem to confirm these remarks. Other women committee members I interviewed tended to offer very different explanations, often complaining that men didn’t listen to them, or allow them to make their views known, and on occasion complained that “men dominate the meetings, and don’t let us talk”.

Education, and especially literacy, does pose a significant constraint on the degree to which committee members are, and can be, involved in important decision making activities, since the efforts surrounding ‘institutional capacity building’ are premised on practices that require a high degree of proficiency with reading and writing. Women’s literacy rates thus pose an immediate constraint on their membership in, and potential contribution to, committees. As is the case in most societies, age is an important basis for involvement in leadership activities and institutions. Manohar is no exception in this regard. However, as we saw in Chapter 6 (Table 6.7), there is a significant disparity among women’s age groups when it comes to literacy rates. Likewise, this disparity is also pronounced in the case of lower caste women. But even within each of these gender categories, it is important to distinguish between caste affiliation, age categories and literacy in order to fully appreciate the constraints on effective participation in community forestry committee activities. One of the few older women who is literate, as well as high-caste and wealthy – Saraswati Malla – is in high demand, and as already

pointed out, a member of both the Ghatte Khola and Manohar Mandir CFUG committees.

Not to be forgotten, literacy is also a constraint for many men, especially in the case of low castes. I interviewed a number of low caste men, asking them if they had ever considered being a member of the CFUG committee. The response of Tek Bahadur Bishowkarma, a member of the Kami caste, is emblematic of many of those I spoke with.; “I did not go to school... I don’t know the [forest] rules. They [the committee] say to us, ‘the forest is open for fuelwood’ and we go. Committee work is for those who know such things.” Tek Bahadur and his family of 7 live in the upper portion of ward 5 and are similar in many respects to other low caste families in terms of his social and economic situation. And as much as he relies on access to the community forest, the functioning of the user group is perceived as something beyond his abilities.

Although there are differences in terms of the length of education among the different committee members, every single one of the members has attended school for a minimum of 6 years and is functionally literate. Clearly, anyone who is illiterate, whether high- or low-caste, male or female, is at a serious disadvantage when it comes to being an effective member of a CFUG committee. If anything literacy is becoming increasingly important as the writing and keeping of records of meetings and funds, various training workshops, planning meetings, and other modern, text-based features of community forestry become institutionalized. It is not surprising then that all three of the user groups have chosen schoolteachers as their committee secretaries.

That education is a barrier to “effective participation” by women and other disadvantaged individuals has not gone unnoticed by community forestry projects. For

many projects, adult literacy programs are an important component of their support for community forestry. How could it be otherwise? Indeed, community forestry, based as it is on documents and formal, modern bureaucratic practices is seen as a natural progression to a more rational, modern system of forest management, even if it is ‘community-based’. As a result, the increasing documentation of life, and its effects (for example, as discussed in Chapter 4), is never questioned. There is no space to ask, Why is it necessary that community forestry be based around formal documents and textual strategies?

Table 7.1: Committee membership by caste and gender

<b>Okhle</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Bahun	7	2	9
			<b>9</b>
<b>Manohar Mandir</b>			
Bahun	3	0	5
Thakuri	5	2	7
Chhetri	3	0	3
			<b>13</b>
<b>Ghatte Khola</b>			
Bahun	6	1	7
Thakuri	0	1	1
Chhetri	1	1	2
Thakali	2	0	2
Magar	3	1	4
Kami	1	0	1
			<b>17</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>31 (79.5%)</b>	<b>8 (20.5%)</b>	<b>39</b>

Source: Fieldnotes, 1999

Nevertheless, reading and writing proficiency does not guarantee that someone will be involved in making decisions, or even knowledgeable about the user group’s own management plan. When asked about the contents of the management plans, out of a total of 39 committee members in the three user groups, only seven reported that they have some knowledge of the contents of the documents, and only 4 of those reported that

they had read it. Only one member from the Ghatte Khola (the secretary Kamal Poudel) and Okhle (the secretary Laxman Acharya) committees had read their management plans. The anomaly with the Manohar Mandir committee members, with 5 members claiming they had some knowledge or had read the document is more a reflection of their more recent hand-over of control, and thus their more recent involvement in writing their management plan. Based on the survey I conducted among the general members of the user groups, not one person said they knew anything more about the contents of the management plan than the rules regarding the collection of forest products; when, where, and how much could be collected.

Even if caste or ethnicity, or gender, is not a basis for membership in one of the community forest users group committee, it is striking to observe that in all three of the community forest users groups the committee chairs are all high-caste Bahuns. Similarly, they are all relatively wealthy, and (as will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter) also have a history of experience as local political leaders. In the case of the Okhle committee, the user group itself only consists of high-caste Bahuns. However, in the Manohar Mandir and Ghatte Khola user groups, there are a number of low-caste households, and only the Ghatte Khola committee has a low-caste member, Bal Bahadur Bishowkarma. When I asked some of the committee members why this was the case, I was frequently told, “dalits [low-caste members] do not come forward in such matters,” a reference to their ‘backwardness’ – their lack of education and other personal qualities they supposedly lack, but others apparently possess. The comments of the local forest ranger were common;



One reason is because the lower castes do not have the confidence to work. We tell them to sit [as a committee member] but they don't have confidence. "Will they obey me? Will I be able to work? I have no studies, I don't know how to write. I cannot do anything," they say. They don't have confidence so they don't agree to be in the committee but we have allowed a quota for women and disadvantaged groups. VDC chairs, vice-chairs including disadvantaged groups quotas are there for the members.

Even many of the low-caste men with whom I conducted interviews expressed the same sentiments. Somewhat surprisingly, I seldom encountered any complaints among low-castes of being openly discriminated against or 'dominated'.<sup>66</sup> The majority seemed to reflect on their limited inclusion on many committees as a reflection of their not having the opportunity to be "involved in such village matters". "Those works [being on committees] are for the *thulo maanchhe* (big people). They can go to meet with people... can go to Beni and Kathmandu. They are active in many political matters.... I cannot do such things. I have farm work and do not have the time," I was told by a middle-aged Kami man.

If we add to the examination of committee membership based on caste and gender, with a consideration of wealth, a similar pattern emerges (Table 7.2.). Based on wealth rankings, there is also a relationship between wealth and representation on committees, although it is worth emphasizing that not all of the members are very rich, nor are all of the wealthiest families in the village involved in community forestry. The

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<sup>66</sup> Surprising, to me, because I had expected to encounter several low-caste men and women who felt that they were openly and/or directly discriminated against by high-castes, and that high-castes dominated them as some kind of malevolent oppressors. Obviously, this was part of my own personal bias, but was also based on direct observations of the interactions I witnessed between several high-caste and low-caste men, and in particular, including the CFUG committee chair (a high-caste Bahun) whose abrasive and condescending tone and manner I grew to find loathsome. I should add that he was an extreme example, and not at all representative of how most high-castes interacted with low-castes.

exceptions to this trend, that is, those who are not ‘very wealthy’ but are important figures in each of the committees, tends to be associated with another important social factor, involvement in politics, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Table 7.2. Committee membership by Wealth Category

<b>Okhle</b>	<b>Very Wealthy</b>	<b>Wealthy</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Bahun	2	4	4	1
<b>Manohar Mandir</b>				
Bahun	1	2	0	0
Thakuri	2	4	1	0
Chhetri	0	1	2	0
<b>Ghatte Khola</b>				
Bahun	1	1	4	0
Thakuri	1	0	0	0
Chhetri	1	0	0	0
Thakali	0	1	1	0
Magar	2	2	0	1
Kami	0	1	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Village Totals</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>31</b>

Source: Fieldnotes, 1999

Roughly half of all the ‘wealthy’ and ‘very wealthy’ households are on the committees, while the representation of the ‘average’ and ‘poor’ sections of the village are much less represented. The situation is even more pronounced when we look at those members of the committees who are the chairmen (*adhakshya*), vice-chairmen (*upa-adhakshya*), secretaries (*sachib*), and treasurers (*kosadhakshya*), and by far the most influential members. Among the twelve ‘office-holders’ on the committees, six are ‘very wealthy,’ four are ‘wealthy,’ and two are ‘average’. Worth mentioning is that all three of the chairmen are all ‘very wealthy,’ with Narayan Subedi, the chairman of the new

Manohar Mandir user group, the wealthiest and arguably one of the most influential in the entire village.

### **Other Committees**

Fisher (1990) suggests that there is an overemphasis on committees as a form of organization. The hand-over process, and the decentralization legislation upon which it relies, depends heavily on formal committees as representative of user groups and as decision-making bodies (Fisher 1990: 18). For Fisher this demonstrates one aspect of the Community Forestry Program where the influence of western values, that have so strongly shaped the program, may be in conflict with the local socio-cultural context in rural communities. And yet, strangely (or perhaps not so strangely), committees are ubiquitous, and not only in Nepal. Anne Ferguson (2001) notes the same kind of committee-ization of village life in Malawi and other Africa nations. They have even come to serve as signs of modernization and ‘development,’ just as roads, electricity, and office buildings have for so long (Pigg 1992). Fisher argues that this emphasis on formal committees is inappropriate for several reasons: committees are often absent in many effective indigenous forest management systems; where there are indigenous “committees,” they rarely conform to the formal Western model which is enshrined in the decentralization legislation, and; committees are not always necessary, nor are they sufficient by themselves (Fisher 1990: 18-19). These aren’t the only reasons why they are inappropriate. Committees also tend to be an effective means of exclusion; disabling the participation of women, disadvantaged groups, and basically anyone who doesn’t have the education, level of literacy, social capital or political clout to voice their opinions in committee meetings where decisions are not so much made as passed.

The kinds of patterns I have noted above, are not limited to forest user groups and their committees. The composition of other committees and groups in Manohar also shows remarkably similar, though not surprising, trends (Table 7.3.). The trends are not surprising, primarily because of the fact that either the same individuals, or members from the same family serve in these other committees. For example, all but two of the members of the three CFUG committees are on at least one of these other committees, and more than half (25 out of 39) serve on more than one. Three individuals, Kamal Acharya, Dil Shahi, and Saraswati Malla are on three. Additionally, each one of these are also politicians in the VDC at various levels: Kamal Acharya is the VDC vice-chair, Dil Shahi is the Ward 2 President, and Saraswati Malla is a Ward 3 representative (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8).

Table 7.3. Caste and Ethnic composition among village committees

Caste/ethnicity Committees	<b>Bahun</b> M/F	<b>Thakuri</b> M/F	<b>Chhetri</b> M/F	<b>Magar</b> M/F	<b>Thakali</b> M/F	<b>Low- caste</b> M/F
Drinking water committee	4/0	3/0	1/0	2/0	2/0	1/0
Health committee	3/1	2/2	1/0	1/1	0/1	1/0
School committee	4/1	3/1	2/0	1/0	1/1	0/0
Youth Club	2/2	4/1	1/0	1/1	2/0	0/0
Mother's Group	0/5	0/5	0/2	0/1	0/2	0/0
Totals	22	21	7	8	9	2
Male/Female ratio	13/9	12/9	5/2	5/3	5/4	2/0

Source: Fieldnotes, 1999

### Who Manages the Forest?

All of the patterns I have discussed thus far illustrate the degree to which caste and ethnic group membership, gender, wealth, and education intersect in terms of those particular individuals with the power to make and enforce decisions for the rest of the

user group members. But another interesting issue arises when we consider precisely who uses the forest and who manages it. When we consider the most influential members of the committees, we see that, with only a couple of (gendered) exceptions, they are not the same individuals who actually go to the forest to collect products, or do any of the technical management operations in the forest.

It is extremely important, however, to not look only at the committee as a general, undifferentiated group. When we examine the case of those particular individuals who are the office holders on these committees, we begin to see the concentration of a number of factors. And all of these factors (caste/ethnicity, education, wealth, gender), tend to spiral together to a single, critical point of concern: that is, there are a very small number of individuals within the village who are in positions of authority over the management of the community forest, while others use and rely upon it. No single characteristic is sufficient, but several of the practices involved in controlling access have fostered a condition that effectively limits those who can and do 'participate' in the management of local community forests. While this condition is by no means unique to social life in Nepal, what makes this situation especially troubling is that it runs counter to the explicit aims and expectations of a particular community-based forest management program considered to be one of the most successful development programs in Nepal.

### **Questioning Convictions**

"The major portion of the forest down below was ours. We had been keeping the forest for 93 years.... I kept the forest for so long, but at last I got nothing. My land was gone. I should have gotten something in return for the pain I have gone through for 93 years to raise the forest. I hear about community forestry on the radio, but I do not know what it is. I cannot read or write, that's the problem..." Krishna Shahi lamented.

"So what happened?" I asked.

Krishna continued, “They came and asked me to give the forest to the community. They came to measure the forest, and I came to the forest. I told them, ‘This portion of the forest is my private forest. This is my *lal mohar* [*birta*] forest’. That made one year’s delay. Then they went to offices and courts, and now they are using the forest. It was several years delay. I had my papers in court.... They [the community] took it from me. Now I cannot touch my own forest. They robbed me of the forest as if I robbed this bag in the daytime.... They robbed me, they robbed my *lal mohar* forest. We asked at court and they said, that they have sent papers (*kagat patra*) to Kathmandu.”

“What was the forest area?” I asked.

“I don’t have exact knowledge of the present measuring system, but I am certain that it is more than 50 *ropani*... more than 60 *ropani*. The forest land was ours, the Shahi brothers”

“Which Shahi brothers?” I asked.

“Damber, Dhana, Dil, Jagat, Chakra, and the others” Krishna replied.

I asked, “What happened when you went to the Supreme Court in Kathmandu?”

Krishna lamented, “I cannot read and write. What could I do? I couldn’t do anything.” [At this point, Krishna’s paternal cousin Damber joined us.] Damber [speaking to Krishna] said, “Daaju [older brother, cousin], you don’t say that. Previously you gave with your will, you wouldn’t contest the decision, and now we should not be talking like that....”

Krishna interrupted, “But I didn’t give the forest happily! 50 villagers signed a campaign, filled a court case against me. They alleged that I *kutpit* [beat] the villagers, showed a knife, threatened a forest guard.”

Damber said, “We went to the CDO [Community Development Office]. Secretly we saw what the allegation was. It was ‘beating the forest guard, ranger, and illegal cutting of a tree.’”

“What is this? I cut a tree? My *own* tree? From my *own* land? And they filed a court case against me. And my own brothers were against me!” Krishna complained.

Damber added, “I suggested to him [Krishna] to leave the forest, because we would have to divide the forest, 75 *ropani*, between 10, 11 brothers, and we would get only 4 or 5 *ropani* for ourselves. So we resolved the case with the villagers saying that ‘we would be leaving the forest if the villagers agreed to draw back the court case.’ And we did and the case was dismissed. I had told you once to give one tree to each household in the village. Narayan Subedi had also agreed. In this way the forest could be cleared and we could have made *napi* (survey, an official measurement of the area), and the land would have been ours. But you didn’t agree and we lost the forest.”

Krishna said, “We did a plantation in the forest. We spent on rangers when they were in the village. We fenced the forest. God knows, even a child also knows that I haven’t brought a single stick from that forest [the community forest]. They [the villagers] sell the forest products, I bring products from my registered land. They threatened me that they would beat me, kill me, throw me,

and under those circumstances I had to leave the forest. Where is accountability? Who gave away the forest? What is the address? It should be defined after they had taken my forest. [Speaking to Damber,] My brother you need not be afraid. Even if somebody kills me, that's o.k. You don't be afraid."

Damber said, "Birta eradication was defined in 2016, but the public did not accept it throughout the country...."



Figure 7.4. Birta grant recipient



Figure 7.5. The Birta (*lal mahor*) document, granted in 1960.

Krishna interrupted again, "We kept this forest for 93 years. First my father did, then me. They sold all the *mauwa*. The environment of satisfaction and dissatisfaction should be known. It should be clarified whether I will get something or not. They are robbing my property by threatening me. Facts should be separated from rumors. [Speaking to Damber,] These people [referring to my research assistant and myself] will decide on what is the truth. It is possible that we will get our property back... or maybe compensation for caring for the forest."

Damber [speaking to Krishna] said, "I suggested to you to give one tree to each household, and Narayan Subedi would enter the forest and we would file a case against him, saying that 'he entered a private forest'. and he would have been broken. But we didn't do the right thing in time."

Krishna added, "We got the forest as Birta from the King in 1960 which we kept until 2053. In 2054, they claimed that the forest belongs to the

community. Besides, 75 *ropani* there was 80 more *ropani* of lowland surrounding the area that they already robbed. We need *man duge* (per diem) for keeping the forest until now. (Interview with Krishna Shahi (and Damber Shahi), March 16, 1999)

Dil Shahi, an ‘elder brother’ (patrilineal first cousin) of Krishna Shahi, and one of the key figures in passing the *birta* grant, of which he had rights to, to the community, gave me his account of the events:

It is from the time of the Malla King. I showed you our damaged castle. They came here to settle. Prithvi Narayan Shah broke and kept with the provision of *birta* and allowance. We had a *birta* from here to Shakun Dhara Pani. The forest was planted in our time, it was agricultural land. In 1996, we planted the forest. In 2016, the *birta* was abolished. We were to pay a tax, the government used to say, but villagers didn’t give much. They started saying that the forest should be theirs [the government’s]. My brothers said that it should be ours. I was the chief of the ward. I thought when the government took it all away then what use is the forest to us. Either they should give back the *birta* as well as an allowance. We do profit with only the forest. Villagers asked where would I go, in our side or on my brother’s side. In reply I said I would be on the people’s side. Otherwise, we have to be given *birta* and allowance by the government. I said to give the forest to the people. This caused an argument; 10 houses on one side, me on the other. I was with the people [the community]. They [the community] fought the case. They spent money. At last the DFO rangers came. When I asked ‘whose would it be, the people’s or personal?’, then they said, ‘it should be the people’s.’ Then the compromise was made.

Community-based programs have arisen with a variety of intentions. Underlying a large part of this advocacy is sympathy for the interests of local communities. For many others, myself included (as is obvious from the content of this section of this study), this sympathy extends to understanding and overcoming various forms of inequality as they hinder access to the distribution of benefits (however defined) from local resource management. But considering many of the overwhelmingly obvious trends I have discussed in this chapter, it is easy to choose sides too easily, without critical reflection.



For example, caste is an easy target upon which to focus blame for inequality. Appadurai (1986: 358) poses the question, “Do all forms of culturally organized inequality begin to be seen excessively through the trope of caste?” In the case of Nepal, and the instances of inequality, which if not ‘organized,’ certainly reveal certain patterns that manifest themselves through community forestry, a necessary question presents itself; How/Why is it that caste has become so common in explaining institutional forms of inequality in Nepal, for example, by development practitioners, and even, more interestingly, among bureaucrats, the vast majority of whom are members of the castes that are so commonly vilified? It is interesting that the ‘problem of caste’ has only recently been voiced, though now amongst the ‘usual suspects’ responsible for limiting the efforts to ‘modernize’. It was not too long ago, in the 1980s, that development practitioners were warned not to speak of caste as a ‘problem’ in the ‘development’ effort (Messerschmidt personal communication).

The case with Krishna Shahi and Dil Shahi, illustrates the need to temper our own, often uncritical convictions. That is, not all high-caste men, even those with substantial financial assets, or who are highly educated have the same degrees of influence, nor are they able to acquire key positions of privilege and authority. The case with Krishna and Dil Shahi led me to think critically about my own biases. For instance, when I initially learned that a family of descendents of the local king, who had possessed a *birta* land grant until recently, that it was taken away and ‘handed-over’ to the ‘community’ as a community forest, I immediately identified this as taking control away from a rich, high-caste family and giving it to the villagers who no doubt needed it. However, Krishna Shahi is not the all-powerful villain. In fact, if it were not for his

efforts in protecting the forest, it would not have been there to ‘hand-over’. That the members of the new user group are now better off is undeniable. However, now five of those who had rights in the *birta*, including Dil Shahi, are on the user group committee, while the wealthiest and highly politically powerful, Narayan Subedi, is the committee’s chair. Hardly a result to warrant congratulations.

The positions of privilege individuals possess should not be seen as a simple reflection of their various subject positions; as if being a member of one of these categories guarantees access to authority. Similarly, not all low castes or women are the same. For example, what do we make of Maya Rokka, the young woman who is a recent addition to the Ghatte Khola CFUG committee? As a young, 22 year old unmarried Magar woman, she is an exception in many respects. Her immediate family consists of her divorced mother, and a younger sister, 18, and brother, 14 (who lives in Beni, attending a ‘private school’ there). They are landless, and rent their home in exchange for their contribution to farm work. Often this entails doing some of the most difficult and least appealing domestic chores; carrying water, cleaning out the livestock stalls, spreading the fertilizer on fields, collecting fuelwood and fodder from the forest. The only apparent asset that could explain Maya’s selection to the Ghatte Khola committee is her educational background; she graduated from 10<sup>th</sup> grade and plans to attend college in Beni after she passes her SLC (School Leaving Certificate) exam. Appearances can be deceiving, however. She is not without an important political connection: Krishna Bahadur Rokka, the former committee chair, Manohar’s first elected VDC chairman, formerly in the Indian Army (and now drawing a pension), and a relatively large and wealthy landowner is Maya’s paternal uncle, and is the landlord with whom Maya and

her family live. While I was initially told that Maya's appointment to the user group committee was "to fill the quota with an educated woman," I was later informed that it was at the urging of Krishna Bahadur Rokka. And thus the importance of paying close attention to the multiple dimensions through which micro-politics operates, dimensions that may or may not be obvious.

### **Summary**

As so much feminist scholarship has stressed, "woman" is not a homogeneous category; nor are any of the others I have used, as the body of literature produced by political ecologists stresses. The various intersections of caste and ethnicity, wealth, and education, as well as other less obvious factors, like personal affiliations (as in the case of Maya Rokka described above), deeply influences the variety of constraints that women, poor, or low-castes must contend. What I have shown in this chapter is that there is an undeniable pattern that emerges with respect to the systematic under-representation of women, low-castes, under-educated or illiterate, and the poor with regards to positions of authority in the management of community forests.

However, notwithstanding these very obvious trends, there is also a tendency to homogenize these categories and to overlook the details of the ways in which particular individuals are able to reposition themselves in various ways that counteract some of their 'categorical' constraints. Thus, we also need to remain skeptical of our oversimplifications and uncritical categorizations. Instead, what needs to be considered are the multiple subject positions that particular individuals occupy, and how these are used by these individuals to further their interests. The involvement of local politicians on user group committees is also exceedingly strong, and is a site in which some

individuals are in a better position to negotiate. This is the subject I will discuss in the next chapter; the increasingly political nature of community forestry at the local level.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE (RE-)POLITICIZATION OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY

*Community forests 'handed over' to Panchayats (now village development committees) will be handed over to Forest User Groups. All previous ties between the community forest and the Panchayat (VDC) are null and void.*

His Majesty's Government (1992: 8)

Politics, as I have argued, is woven throughout the fabric of development and community forestry policy, where 'democracy' and its institutionalization have become emblematic of both, representing a kind of 'democratic triumphalism' of sorts. Recent political events, in particular, the 1999 election that occurred during my research in Nepal, seemed to stimulate a number of 'political' connections with community forestry. One of the more interesting is the degree to which community forestry has become synonymous with 'democracy'. As the national political system has 'democratized,' so to has community forestry. My interviews with forest user group committee members, foresters, and community forestry project staff, only seemed to confirm this. Many of the responses I received referred to the provision of forest products for all members of the user group, emphasizing the newfound principles of equality. Several responses, however, emphasized the locus of forest management responsibility and authority being situated in the user group's hands rather than the state. Many even proclaimed community forestry to be "for the people, of the people, by the people". This particular way of defining community forestry seems to resonate all too well with the importance villagers place on 'democracy' and especially 'decentralization'. Several questions still

remain to be explored, however: To what extent are the principles of ‘democracy’ being adopted at the local level? In what ways do political considerations affect the operations of community forestry? To what extent is community forestry promoting greater political representation and a participatory environment for politically marginalized sections of society? To what extent are the proscriptions of community forestry being appropriated, modified, and resisted in efforts by local political and economic elites to advance their interests and entrench their authority and control at the local level?

### **The De-Politicization of Forest Management**

One of the major turning points in the history of forest management in Nepal was the enactment of *Panchayat* Forest and *Panchayat*-Protected Forest legislation in 1978. For many this is considered the initial shift towards a more community-based or ‘people-centered’ approach to forest management. As the Secretary of the Ministry of Forests explained,

Forest management became ‘community’ oriented before the Master Plan. Before, in the 1950s and 1960s [forests] were controlled by the government. But we couldn’t effectively manage it.... In the 1970s we passed the [National] Forestry Plan and the *Panchayat* Forest legislation, and the government handed control to the people... to the village *panchayats*, to give forest products to villagers.

These rules were issued as part of the First Amendment of the Forest Act and were intended to involve communities and private interests in the management of forests. It was under this new legislation that the rules and regulations governing the handing over of government forestland - virtually all land not cultivated or otherwise under private ownership - to the control of the *gaun* (village) *panchayat* were specified. These areas were to be operated under an official management plan with the objective of supplying

the forest produce needs of the people living in the *panchayat*. In particular, *Panchayat* Forests were defined as degraded forest areas to be entrusted to the village *panchayat* for reforestation in the interest of the village community.

Important to note about *Panchayat* Forest legislation was that forests were demarcated according to political boundaries – according to *panchayats* – while the authority over the management and use of the forest was given to the *panchayat* political representative, the *pradhan panch*. In other words, this legislation situated (located) forest management responsibility in a political-territorial unit, thus privileging locality very early in ‘community’-based management schemes. That the local *pradhan panch* was charged with the day-to-day decisions as to who could enter the forest, when, and what products they could collect (even though ultimate authority still resided with the District Forest Officer) was seen by many within the Department of Forests and at the local level as a significant shift. One of the problems with *Panchayat* Forest legislation, however, was that forests ultimately remained in the control of the government, even if only in the hands of local government representatives (the *pradhan panch*). As one community forestry project staff member remarked, “at the time, the government believed that this legislation was giving control to local communities,” whereas “local villagers viewed this as a transfer from the central government to local government.... [but] still in government hands, nonetheless.” According to the Department of Forests’ own reports, the success of *Panchayat* Forestry was extremely limited. The area of forest handed over represented only a small fraction of the forest area available. Among the reasons for the disappointing results were:

the impractical nature of the PF [*Panchayat* Forest] and PPF [*Panchayat* Protected Forest] Forest Rules which failed to create an environment for the full participation of all users. Neither did they provide a clear procedure for the transfer of authority for protection, management and utilization of forests to the users. The “Handover Certificates” of PF and PPF were issued to the *Panchayat*. In effect the management authority was transferred from the DFO to the *pradhan panch* while the status of the custodial element remained the same (HMG 1991: 17).

The *Panchayat* Forest Rules may have transferred some of the responsibilities to lower levels of government, but ‘communities’ were no more empowered to make decisions than they were previously.

Thus began the change in policy towards the creation of the ‘user group’ concept as the locus of forest management responsibility and authority. Community forestry, predicated now upon the creation of and transfer of control to forest user groups rather than *panchayat* political bodies, is considered a turning point in the transition towards a truly *community*-based brand of forest management. Several committee members and villagers in Manohar echoed these sentiments. Narayan Subedi, the chair of the Manohar Mandir FUG committee, spoke of how much better it has been for villagers since the change from when the *panchayat* (and *pradhan panch*) had control to the current situation with the user’s group with authority: “Before we had to beg to go into the forest for fodder, fuelwood,” Subedi recalled, “but now the forest is ours. We get products when we need them.... If we need something, timber to build a home or more fuelwood, users can ask [the committee] and they will get it”.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Narayan Subedi’s comments are extremely ironic, since he was Manohar’s last *pradhan panch*, before the switch to VDCs and multi-party democracy.



Community forestry, however, now finds itself in a contradictory position vis-à-vis politics. In this transition there has been an attempt to ‘de-politicize’ forest management – to shift the site of power and how power is exercised - in two respects. The first involves the attempt to move beyond politically defined territories, and thus re-map the geography of forest management. In other words, community forestry is seen as a way to redesign the spatial coordinates of forests and the members of forest user groups. The other attempt at ‘de-politicization’ revolves around the locus of authority. No longer are forests, and the decisions regarding access, to be under the power of local politicians. The contradictions arise in that all of the practices and procedures surrounding community forestry have been geared towards fostering ‘democracy,’ ‘decentralization,’ and ‘participation,’ all of which are highly politically charged concepts.

What remains is to examine the outcome of this ‘de-politicization’ within the village context. To what extent has community forestry ‘de-politicized’ itself? What seems to be occurring however, provides yet another contradiction. Based on the situation in Manohar, as well as in other VDCs in Myagdi and in other districts, it appears that community forestry rather than removing forest management from the local political realm has instead remained highly ‘politicized’. Indeed, I argue that community forestry is opening up of a new political space within which established local elites are able to further extend their sphere of influence at the local level (and in some cases, beyond, to district, regional, and national levels). Additionally, this extension of power and authority has been accomplished in a manner that legitimizes it in ways that complement and add to traditional spheres of influence. But this entrenchment of control by already

established elites takes on new meaning because of the degree to which ‘democracy’ is so extensively fetishized. ‘Democracy’ isn’t just an ideal that has become a dominant trope limited to community forestry, among local villagers it is a profoundly valorized concept at a very general level. However, the connection between community forestry and ‘democracy’ is one that is only loosely articulated, if at all, by local villagers. At times, those most directly involved in community forestry at the local level, the members of user group committees, are steadfast in their denial of the role of politics in community forestry. Seldom would anyone within the three user group committees in Manohar admit that politics influenced the functioning of their user groups.

### **The Political Structure**

Let me begin with a brief review of Nepal’s administrative structure. As was the case in the previous *panchayat* era, the new democratic Nepal is divided into 5 development regions, 75 districts (district development committees), and approximately 3500 villages (village development committees). Village Development Committees (VDCs) are the smallest (official) political units, but are further sub-divided into nine wards. An elected representative leads each of these levels. The two main political leaders within the VDC are the VDC chair (*adhyekhshe*) and vice-chair (*upa-adhyekhshe*). Each ward also elects a ward president (*wada adhyekhshe*), who attends VDC council meetings, and four other ward representatives who help advise the ward president (Figure 8.1.). Additionally, recent legislation requires that at least one woman be selected by each ward to serve as a representative.

Elected through universal suffrage, members of the VDC council are quite influential at the local level. Perhaps the most important of the discretionary powers the

chair and vice-chair possess is in terms of making-decisions regarding the expenditure of funds at the local level. The primary expenses VDCs face include the salaries of teachers, health post staff, and the VDC chair, vice-chair, and secretary, as well as expenses for various local development-related activities. Over the past decade in Manohar, the largest disbursements of funds have been to cover construction costs for a number of ‘community development’ projects:

- 26 water taps were built throughout the village (between 1994 and 1997),
- an addition to the school in ward 1 was constructed in 1996,
- a cement wall was constructed for the Deepak schoolyard,
- repairs to eroded trails (most of the expenses for labor),
- a substantial contribution for the construction of an office building, shared by the Manohar Youth Club, the new local Mother’s Group (*aamaa samuha*), and the Manohar Mandir CFUG,
- the construction of a new VDC office, and
- Contributions for all of these projects were also made by each of the community forestry user groups, together totally more than Rs. 100,00 (approximately \$ 1,500).

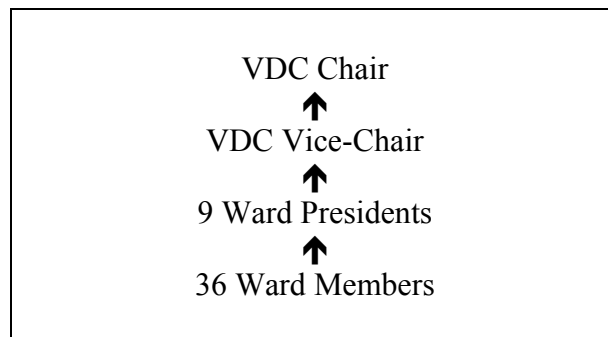


Figure 8.1. VDC political representatives

Although local political representatives, especially the chair and vice-chair, are highly influential at the local level, their powers are constrained by their position as political representatives of the central government. Moreover, despite recent attempts to increase the autonomy of VDCs and DDCs through the passing of the Local Governance

Act, 1998, the chair and vice-chair of the VDC are ultimately accountable to the central government. In other words, the VDC is still not an entirely autonomous political body from the standpoint of official policy (Chapagain et al 1999).

### **The Politics of Forest Boundaries**

The transition from *panchayat* to *community* forests claims to allow for a closer correspondence between forests and those who use it regardless of forest location or the users' residence. The change in legislation is believed to combat two problems related to a strict reliance on political-administrative boundaries. To begin with forests frequently overlap political boundaries, whether at the level of wards, VDCs, or even districts. In such cases, the users of these forests are themselves situated in multiple wards, VDCs, or DDCs depending on the nature of the forest. Under early legislation, there was no provision for a single section of forest to be handed over to more than one *panchayat* without being divided into separate sections. Additionally, there was no provision for title to be handed over to anyone but the *panchayat*. Consequently, forests were delineated according to the political boundaries, with those given access to these forests based on residence in one *panchayat* or the other. Community forestry attempts to overcome these problems by granting access to all users of a forest regardless of residence. And yet, there still remains a very close correspondence between both VDC and ward boundaries of forests and the residence of the users.

The general situation in Myagdi district, and a particular case in Manohar, provides a basis to explore some of the issues concerning political boundaries. Both the Manohar Mandir and Ghatte Khola community forests have been given to members from multiple wards – Wards 1, 2, and 3 in the Manohar Mandir CFUG, and Wards 4 and 5 in

the Ghatte Khola CFUG. However, there are no natural breaks separating these two forests. Together they cover the entire lower portion of the hillside in the VDC (Figure 6.1.). If we take an even larger view of the forest, we see that it also runs contiguously into forests in Ghatan VDC to the southeast and Jhi VDC to the Northwest. None of the residents of either of these other VDCs were approached to be included in either the Manohar Mandir or the Ghatte Khola CFUGs. The bias, or political expediency, in not including these ‘other villages’ is perhaps understandable. So too is the preference (or “unofficial mandate”) to “keep community forests and user groups small and manageable”. “If the forest is too large it is too difficult for villagers to manage,” a group of forest rangers in Myagdi told me. The District Forest Officer added, “When there is a small number of users they can agree on the rules... they follow the rules and do the forest work [management] better. Large groups will fight easy.... We have had some problems in some forests and it is very difficult.... Many people from different villages have problems with politics, that is why we keep groups small.”

Less understandable, however is the separation along ward boundaries within Manohar, especially with regard to the Ghatte Khola community forest. Although this user group includes 3 households from Ward 3, their inclusion in the group is only partly due to their location adjacent to the boundary of Wards 3 and 4. There are in fact at least 16 other households in Ward 3 that are much closer to the Ghatte Khola forest. They were not included in the user group, the committee chair told me, “Because this [the Ghatte Khola] forest belongs only to Wards 4 and 5.” A villager whose home is located in Ward 3 gave a different reason; “They are ‘one with the *upa-adhyekshe*’ (VDC vice-chair)... They too are *thulo maanchhe* [big people, powerful] and are also doing village

works with him [the VDC vice-chair]. That is why he considered them for the user group”.

As of June 1999, 202 CFUGs had been formed in Myagdi district (Table 4.2.). Of those not one user group has been formed with members from more than one VDC.<sup>68</sup> In the neighboring districts of Baglung and Parbat, included in the NUKCFP area, a further 221 and 217 CFUGs have been formed. In those districts, each has only one CFUG formed from multiple VDCs. Thus, out of three districts and a total of 640 user groups, there are only two with multiple VDC membership. One of the instructors at the Institute of Forestry offered an explanation:

Before community forestry, when forests were given to village *panchayats*, the villagers began to feel that the forest belonged to their *panchayat*. It was as if it was their own. It is the same with VDCs now. Even VDC chairmen want to control all the forests and other resources within the area.... Another problem is political parties. This causes conflicts between VDCs. Different VDCs have different party chairmen and this prevents them from coming together. Politics is not supposed to affect community forestry but it still does. Even among forestry students, politics is important.<sup>69</sup>

Villagers, in other words, have become conditioned to political boundaries being the ‘natural’ way of defining their connection to resources..

In Myagdi district, there have been attempts to construct user groups consisting of members from multiple political units. As I left the village in December, 1999, a user group was being formed near Beni, the district center, with residents from two separate

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<sup>68</sup> These figures come from the NUKCFP information database.

<sup>69</sup> Students at the Institute of Forestry, like at other campuses in Nepal, are extremely politically active. The campus had just been reopened before this interview was conducted. They had closed the campus by going on strike, in part related to differing political party allegiances among faculty and students.

VDCs located on opposite sides of the Kali Gandaki river, one from Myagdi district and the other in Kaski district. Another example, this one involving residents of wards 1 and 8 of Manohar and residents in the neighboring village of Pulachaur, provides a case of bitter conflict eventually undermining the hand-over of a forest.

In 1996, these villagers had begun the process of organizing and meeting with the local forest ranger to get control of the relatively small forest patch called Ghartigaun forest. Approximately 8-9 hectares, the forest was the result of plantation and protection efforts initiated by USAID's Resource Conservation and Utilization Project, which was in operation when Manohar was part of Ghatan *panchayat*. Pulachaur was also at that time under the political jurisdiction of Ghatan *panchayat*. As a result of administrative re-territorializations Ghartigaun forest overlaps the two VDCs – the larger portion in Manohar is located in Ward 8. Initially, there was little difficulty in reaching agreement among the various members of the user group. They had formed a CFUG committee, with members representing each locale, and the management plan was being arranged. As is common among user groups undergoing this process, they began managing and using the forest, based on a draft of the management plan. Part of this group's management plan involved dividing the forest into separate blocks, according to the number of users from each area. However, following the local VDC election a series of disputes escalated leading to the breakdown in the user group. Further attempts to resolve the disputes and hand-over the forest stopped. On several occasions the local forest ranger in charge of this area (as part of his range post) was caught in the middle and threatened (even violently) by more than one side of the dispute as he attempted to find some kind of resolution.

The source of the conflict exceeded territorial or residential divisions among the respective forest users. Part of the dispute revolved around intercaste politics, but was exacerbated by the outcome of the local VDC election in 1998. As background to the politics of caste and ethnicity, the area of Wards 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Manohar are inhabited by a relatively large ‘village’ of Magars (consisting of approximately 140 households) called Aulo. In contrast, all of the 26 families of the area of Ward 1 that were involved were all high-caste Bahuns. The 16 households from adjacent Pulachaur VDC that were included in the group consisted of high-caste Bahuns, Chhetris, and Thakuris. Although I was never given any specific reason, there was a general consensus among those I interviewed (mostly other residents in Manohar) that there had been a long-standing animosity between several of the households in all three of these areas.<sup>70</sup> As the election approached some of the old animosity apparently began to resurface due to political party alliances.

During my interviews with villagers and CFUG committee members, I would ask, how does politics affect community forestry? Consistently, the responses would deny any influence of (party) politics in the functioning of user groups? “We don’t allow politics to come into our decisions,” I would be told. Even during the interview I had with Ram Chandra Sharma, the Okhle CFUG chair and one of the committee members embroiled in the dispute over the Ghartigaun forest, he denied any political considerations affecting forest management. I asked him, “Why not?” “Because we are all members of the [Nepali] Congress party,” he told me, as if to say that allegiance to the

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<sup>70</sup> I was told by several different people uninvolved in the dispute that there had been disagreements over some land and several cattle.



same party nullified any influence due to politics. This may have explained why the Okhle user group was all in agreement (though the familial relations among the group of Bahuns was probably also an important factor), but it was one of the sources of political party difference between the three groups. The members of the would-be user group from Paluchaur were fervent supporters of the United Marxist-Leninist (UML) party, while the residents of Aulo are aligned with the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). To make matters worse, Lal Bahadur Pun, a resident of Ward 8 (Aulo), a Magar and the local leader of the RPP, defeated his Nepali Congress opponent, Ram Dutta Sharma from Okhle. The conflict erupted when, after the election, Pun in his new position as VDC chair, unilaterally declared that only the residents of Ward 8 would be able to use the section of Ghartigaun forest located in Manohar. While all the residents of the area continue to collect forest products from the forest, even without the authority to do so, any further attempts to claim official control have been muted since no-one is able to make claims of being a ‘traditional’ user of the forest – having been the relatively recent product of the RCU Project.

This dispute highlights the degree to which residential and political allegiance overlap and has displaced more pressing material concerns with forest access. The role that politicians played in this dispute raises the next issue, the relationship between politicians and community forestry. I will now turn to explore the contours of local political relations and how community forestry, I believe, has opened up a new political space at the local level, a space that established elites seem better equipped to negotiate and expand to their own benefit.

## Political Power in Disguise

As I have argued throughout this study, the convergence of development and politics, and its emphasis on the themes of ‘decentralization’ and ‘democracy’ has had a profound influence on the way community forestry is envisaged, legislated, and practiced. The increasing connection between development, politics, and community forestry has not been in a single direction. There are a number of scholars, development practitioners, and forestry staff who also believe that the transition to community forestry was a contributing factor in the increasing dissatisfaction with the *panchayat* system towards the end of the 1980s, and even fueled the democratic movement in 1990-91. Many believe that the experience villagers gained through the ‘democratic’ functioning of community forestry, and its emphasis on equality and participation, inspired and supported the more urban-based criticism and unrest. Nevertheless, ‘democracy’ in both the political realm and in community forestry has been a consistent emphasis ever since.

Thus, when I began my fieldwork I hypothesized that community forestry might be providing a venue with which local elites could gain political power and experience that they could then translate into the political capital necessary to acquire positions in political office. While there is a very strong connection between political office holders and membership on CFUG committees, it appears that the direction is the inverse to what I had supposed; individuals who are politicians are becoming members of CFUG committees, and the higher the political office, the higher the position on the CFUG committee.

Among the three user groups in Manohar, there are a total of 39 committee members (Table 7.1); Okhle with 9, Manohar Mandir with 13, and Ghatte Khola with 17.

Of these members all but 4 are now, or were, politicians within the village in some capacity, and 3 of the 4 not in politics are women (Table 8.1). More importantly, the current VDC chair is the chair of the Ghatte Khola user group committee, the chair of the Manohar Mandir committee was the last *pradhan panch* in Manohar, and the chair of the Okhle committee is the Ward 1 president, and former leader of the Nepali Congress party at the local level.



Figure 8.2. Local politicians at a village gathering

That community forestry has been attractive for politicians in Manohar is only part of a much larger politicization of committees in Myagdi district and beyond to the national level. In March of 1999 I attended a workshop being offered by the District Forest Office in Myagdi – a workshop I affectionately dubbed ‘The Most Ironic Community Forestry Workshop’. The official title of the workshop was “VDC

Awareness Workshop”. The purpose of the workshop was to inform, or ‘raise the awareness’ of, VDC chairmen about community forestry. Within Myagdi district there

Table 8.1. Numbers of Political representatives in Manohar on CFUG committees

Political Office 1992-1998	On CFUG Committee	Political Office 1998-Present	On CFUG Committee
VDC Chair	✓	VDC Chair	✓
VDC Vice-Chair	✓	VDC Vice-Chair	✓
Ward Presidents		Ward Presidents	
#1	✓	#1	✓
#2	✓	#2 Ⓜ	✓
#3	✓	#3	✓
#4	✓	#4 Ⓜ	✓
#5	✓	#5	✓
Ward 1 Members		Ward 1 Members	
1A	✗	1A	✓
1B	✓	1B*	✗
1C	✓	1C Ⓜ	✓
1D	✓	1D Ⓜ	✓
2A	✓	2A Ⓜ	✓
2B	✓	2B Ⓜ	✓
2C	✓	2C*	✗
2D	✓	2D Ⓜ	✓
3A	✓	3A	✓
3B	✓	3B Ⓜ	✓
3C	✓	3C*	✓
3D	✓	3D Ⓜ	✓
4A	✓	4A Ⓜ	✓
4B	✓	4B Ⓜ	✓
4C	✓	4C*	✗
4D	✓	4D Ⓜ	✓
5A	✗	5A Ⓜ	✓
5B	✓	5B	✗
5C	✓	5C*	✓
5D	✓	5D Ⓜ	✓
Totals	25	Totals	23

\*=women representatives; Ⓜ=reelected/same as 92-98

Source: Fieldnotes, 1999

are 44 VDCs and during the meeting 36 of the VDC chairmen (all men) were in attendance. At one point during the meeting, each of those in attendance (including

myself) were asked to stand, introduce themselves and say something about their interest and/or experiences with community forestry in their respective VDCs. I became aware of the fact that many of these politicians had a good deal of experience with community forestry, many of them apparently on the user group committees. During a short tea break I took the opportunity to ask how many of them were actually on a CFUG committee; 28 of the 36 were committee members at the present time, while another 4 were in the process of organizing with forest rangers to get control of a local forest. And thus the irony of a workshop intended to inform politicians about community forestry.

I was already familiar with the ‘politicization’ of community forestry in Manohar, but its prevalence within the district, among other VDC chairmen, led me to wonder about the extent of this phenomenon more generally, throughout Nepal. For Myagdi district, I was able to get records of the individuals who are the current VDC chairmen and vice-chairmen, as well as those for the previous period, 1992-97.<sup>71</sup> Cross-checking these with the records from the NUKCFP of the committee members of all the user groups, the results were astonishing (Table 8.2). For 1992-97, 27 (of 88 possible) of the VDC chairmen and vice-chairmen were also on CFUG committees. By 1998 the number had jumped considerably to 51. It was not possible to acquire records on Ward representatives in each of the VDCs, however, I was able to interview several of the forest rangers working in other areas of the district. Their impression was that most of the members of the committees are politicians. In fact, many forest rangers would even

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<sup>71</sup> I also collected this information for Baglung and Parbat districts. The data on committee membership for these districts was incomplete, but a rough estimate of what data was available showed a similar trend. This was also supported by the comments of forest rangers and the District Forest Officers in these districts.

suggest that the user groups choose individuals with experience in politics to be members of the committees. According to the District Forest Officers of both Baglung and Parbat districts, in those districts the CFUG committees were also mostly composed of politicians.

I continued to expand outwards, and asked many other community forestry project staff working in other districts in other parts of Nepal whether they encountered a concentration of politicians on user group committees. All reported that a large number of CFUG committees were “dominated by politicians”. One project coordinator told me of a series of studies conducted in a couple of districts in the Far Western Development Region that showed the same results as what I had found in Myagdi district. When I had asked about the details of the study, and if I could get a copy, I was told that the study had been buried because of the results. And here it is that an ambivalence emerges around the intersections of ‘politics’ (and especially politicians), ‘democracy,’ and community forestry.

Table 8.2. Numbers of political representatives and position in CFUG committees in Myagdi District

<b>CFUG Chairman</b>	<b>CFUG Vice-Chairman</b>	<b>CFUG Secretary</b>	<b>CFUG Treasurer</b>	<b>CFUG comm Member</b>	<b>Totals</b>
1992-97					
9 (33%)	4 (15%)	3 (11%)	5 (19%)	6 (22%)	<b>27</b>
1997-Present					
21 (41%)	3 (6%)	5 (10%)	3 (6%)	19 (37%)	<b>51</b>

Source: Fieldnotes, 1999

Instilling ‘democratic’ values and transforming user groups and their committees into reflections of the western bureaucratic and democratic ideal is one of the more potent ambitions of community forestry policy. However, that same policy was designed with

the intention that community forestry was to benefit the marginalized and disempowered sections of society. While the numbers of politicians on committees might be an effective means of promoting the former, it has hardly been effective in the latter case, especially when concerns about the representativeness of committees is at stake.

### **The Implications of Politicization**

Recall that when forestry policy changed from *Panchayat* Forest management to Community Forestry, the objective was not only to free up the demarcation of forests from the confines of rigid and unjustifiable political units. The primary aim was to give authority to ‘the people’. In other words, *community* forestry also meant taking control out of the hands of VDC (formerly *panchayat*) politicians and into the hands of the ‘community’. However, as the above discussion shows, it is still the politicians, and in many cases, the very same politicians who remain in control of forests. Only now it is under the guise of membership in a CFUG committee.

Perhaps one of the most serious implications of such a high number of politicians in positions of authority in community forestry, with so many on committees, is that it leads to a reappraisal of the Community Forestry Program’s claims to be ‘decentralizing’ control to the ‘community’. Instead, this could also be seen as a trend towards greater ‘centralization’ of control at the local level, concentrated, not only in the committee, but also in politicians’ hands. And this has resulted in the further disempowerment of community members, rather than their empowerment and greater participation, as was the goal of community forestry policy and legislation. This is not to suggest the other members of the user group are made worse off in all cases, since even as they acknowledge that they have limited access to positions of authority, they do still perceive

themselves to be much better off with community forestry than with the previous situation under nationalized forests and *Panchayat* Forest legislation

Clearly, community forestry has not meant a de-politicization of forest management through the creation of user groups as was the intention. Rather, it has opened up a new political space such that those in positions of power have greater and broader bases of power and control at the local level, than they have had solely within the political realm. The attractiveness of being a chair or vice-chair, rather than a VDC politician is that community forestry allows for much greater flexibility in the use of funds, and even provides the opportunity to generate funds far in excess of what VDCs are provided yearly by the central government. This situation is quite attractive to the state, however, as the funds generated through community forestry enable local communities to initiate even more local community development projects, for example, the Manohar resident's desire for electricity and telephone service. Thus, perhaps even more significant than the state's devolution of responsibility for forest management through community forestry, is the devolution of responsibility for local community development in general.

### **Summary**

Whereas in Chapter 7 I discussed the issues of social difference as they play out in terms of participation, empowerment and distribution of benefits in community forestry, focusing more at a general level, in terms of caste, wealth, gender differences. In this chapter I have focused specifically on these issues in terms of politics – how community forestry is, rather than de-politicizing itself, becoming increasingly politicized. Once again, the reason this is a major concern is that community forestry



aims, and claims, to increase the “participation” of lower caste, poor, and female community members in community forestry; in the management – including their participation in meetings, decision-making, membership in the user group committee, attendance in the various kinds workshops. That this is not happening, seriously undermines the credibility of the representativeness of community forestry.

In her study of marginality in Indonesia, Anna Tsing remarks that “village politics contribute to making the state; the categories of state rule are actualized in local politics”. Her comments suggest the importance of attending to the way in which local politics may, or may not, be transformed through a project that aims at changing political traditions and sites of power. Community forestry, in its guise as a form of participatory development, aims to redress the failures and inequities of top-down centralized forest management. The shift to handing over control to forest user groups is also presented as a rather compelling form of de-politicized forestry – compelling because the attempts to de-politicize forest management, to separate and set it apart from the state, local politicians, and the territorializing strategies (spatial-political) that characterized state control and *panchayat* forest legislation, have done little in this respect. Indeed, it seems that these policies have only served to obscure the fact that community forestry remains as politicized as ever. Michael Dove (1987) has gone so far as to state, “whenever the government is involved in the devolution (and/or development) of land, an opportunity is created for the economic and political elite to misappropriate it”. It is clear that community forestry policy, and the efforts of projects, have contributed to this with their focus on ‘democracy’. And this seems all the more troubling when the immense popularity of politics, and especially, ‘democracy’ disguises the unrepresentative nature

of community forestry, where the local political and economic elite have extended their control over resources in ways legitimized by ‘democratic’ ideals.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION: FOREST PLACES, POLITICAL SPACES

*How hard to pin down the truth, especially when one is obliged to see the world in slices; snapshots conceal as much as they make plain.*

Salman Rushdie, *Shame*

In this study I have set out to examine the emergence and political implications of Nepal's Community Forestry Program. My mode of analysis has been to reveal some of the important influences that have shaped the direction of community forestry as a development program as well as some of the political consequences of adopting an ostensibly 'community-based' forest management program. Thus the reason for my examination of the wider historical, political and development contexts that have shaped the direction and outcome of the emergence of community forestry. In the course of this study, I have concentrated on the political and social relations that have undergone revision and expansion as a consequence of the new political space opened up by community forestry as it is now being promoted as a kind of democratic, decentralized development program. Indeed, politics has become a primary theme throughout the study. At the same time, the political effects of community forestry can only be fully appreciated when an examination of its policies are balanced and grounded in an understanding of its effects at the local level, among the 'communities' who put community forestry into practice.

Although this study concludes that Nepal's Community Forestry Program has not managed to achieve some of its most central stated objectives, this is not meant to suggest that community forestry has been a failure, or that claims of its "success" are somehow misguided or delusional. There can be no denying that community forestry has made local villagers much better off than under previous forest management regimes. Forests are being handed over to newly created 'communities,' or 'user groups,' villagers have greater and more direct access to forest products, the funds generated from the sale of forest products are being used to support numerous local community development initiatives, but beyond these basic indicators for "Nepal's most successful development program," other social and political changes are taking place in the name of development, democracy, and community forestry. However, Foucault's work on the penal system, psychiatry, and madness, applied to development and community forestry, encourages an analysis that focuses not on development's stated objectives, but instead on what development as a set of practices actually does and what or whose interests are served by those practices. An understanding of the implications of community forestry thus requires an analysis that goes beyond the stated objectives of the program, and of development in Nepal more generally, to examine the manner in which community forestry has modified social and political relations at two levels: between the state and local communities, on the one hand, and on the other within communities where local political and economic elite have been able to extend their scope of authority and power. In bringing these two dimensions together (and the content of the two section of this study), I have attempted to show the mutual interdependence between the state and communities, of how, as Nugent (1994: 336) states, "each helps create, construct, and

enable (or not enable) the other according to specific material-political interests and cultural conceptions that are contingent in time and through space.”

### **Community Forestry, Communities, and the State**

In the first section of this study I examined in detail the connections between politics, development, and the emergence of community forestry. Primarily historically based, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 serve as a basis for examining the relationship between community forestry and the expansion of control by the state. In Chapter 2 I examined Nepal’s political history, demonstrating a pattern in the state’s attempts to construct an administrative apparatus, to expand and stabilize its authority, as a response to its own role in advancing the interests and bases of economic and political control among national, regional, and local elite. In particular, there has been a continuous tension, even contradiction, between the processes of state formation, of administrative expansion and the centralization of control by the state on the one hand, and its more recent efforts to introduce ‘decentralized’ programs in an effort to foster development and democracy on the other hand. Rather than see these processes as a recent phenomenon, of the immense popularity of ‘democracy’ in the past decade, for example, I have emphasized that the interest in decentralization has been strongly related to Nepal’s interest in, and struggles with, introducing democratic systems of government which date back to the 1950s, long before the ‘people’s democratic movement’ of 1990-91.

Far from being monolithic or static, development in Nepal has expanded tremendously and has experienced several transformations and permutations over the past five decades. At the same time, there has also been a high degree of continuity throughout this period. Here again, the promotion of decentralization and democracy, in

this case within the development arena, is not a recent occurrence. A concern with these themes, and a general interest in promoting ‘political stability,’ were focal points for early interventions of the United States from the earliest stages of development intervention. In the period since 1950, as I argued in Chapter 3, development, especially the support provided by the US, was instrumental in supporting and directing the contours of the administrative apparatus, even as development programs, and community forestry, spoke of fostering greater local ‘participation,’ community-based development initiatives and decentralization. This was largely why the *panchayat* system was so heavily supported by the US; it was believed to provide both a basis for expanding development efforts and political stability (by further expanding the administration), yet was couched in the rhetoric of ‘decentralization’. This is also why community forestry has been such an attractive program to support. While other donor agencies were initially slow in following the American lead, democracy, decentralization, participation, and the ‘good governance’ agenda were being incorporated by all major western donors by the 1990s in their support of a wide variety of development projects in Nepal. Even after the transition to a multi-party democracy, the close alliance between development and politics has persisted.

In Chapter 2 I also highlighted that the local elite have long been able to manipulate state policies such that the state’s control has been highly fragmentary at best, making efforts to centralize control all that more important. Even in the post 1950 period, when continual pronouncements indicated the government’s plans to introduce changes in the administrative system and eliminate the concentrations of power and wealth in society, the established elite have managed to remain politically and socially

the most powerful members of society. For example, when the *panchayat* system was introduced, the majority of the political and economic elite from the previous regime came to dominate the new system, as has also occurred during the shift from the *panchayat* system to the current multi-party, 'democratic' system. That local elite have managed to capture positions of authority within FUG committees thus seems hardly surprising given historical trends. But to dismiss this tendency as merely the product of cultural and political tradition fails to consider the immense effort within development and community forestry to transform this situation, to provide an 'enabling environment' to promote greater participation in the management of forests among non-elite. While traditional cultural patterns cannot be entirely disregarded, I have tried to suggest that the formal practices associated with community forestry have tended exacerbate the already existing divide between the politically powerful and marginal members of rural villages.

The history of the emergence of Nepal's Community Forestry Program, presented in Chapter 4, serves the dual purpose of illustrating the considerable transformation Nepal's forest policy and related practices have undergone during the last half century, and how these changes have increasingly been shaped by wider development imperatives. The state's earliest policies, were primarily concerned with generating revenue and often supported the conversion of forests for agricultural production. These policies gave way in the 1950s to a period of state control with a primary concern with the protection of forests *from* local villagers. While these policies were initially premised primarily on the commercial value of forests (as a source of revenue), by the 1970s environmental concerns became the dominant rationale for forest protection. The importance of environmental concerns was gradually displaced during the 1980s as other development

imperatives took precedence: meeting villagers' 'basic needs,' improving livelihoods, promoting 'participation' and 'democratic institution building'. These concerns increasingly came to redefine the aims, objectives, and practices associated with a more community-based approach to forest management. By tracing the history of community forestry, I have emphasized how the program has not emerged in isolation from these wider political, development, and social themes that have become central features in Nepal over the past half century. Perhaps more important, community forestry's connection with these wider issues provides a basis for examining how the program, now defined as a 'decentralized' development program, has managed to provide a basis for greater centralization, despite claims to the contrary.

Drawing on the work of Foucault (1979, 1980, 1991), Sivaramakrishnan (1995, 1996, 1998, 1999), Vandergeest and Peluso (1995), Scott (1998), Schroeder (1999) and others interested in the processes of state-formation, I have attempted to argue that community forestry is fostering a basis for greater centralized control of resources and local populations by the state. However, I focus less on the formal structures of the state and instead examine in detail such practices as record-keeping, monitoring, planning, etc., which are now central features associated with community forestry. These practices were examined as part of attempts to rationalize and modernize (i.e., formalize, regulate, codify, transcribe, and standardize) both the technical (forest-related) and institutional (social and political) arrangements being transformed through community forestry. But rather than assess them as to whether they make community forestry more or less efficient or sustainable, I have examined them in terms of how they serve as mechanisms for greater state control. This process of greater centralized control, however, should not



be seen as the result of a coercive or repressive state. Instead, I believe the processes of centralization are better envisaged as part of a series of unintended consequences of a benevolent (or perhaps ambivalent) state. At the same time, it is important to consider how and the degree to which the ‘strategies of control’ that facilitate greater centralization are also accepted and adopted at the local level. It is in this respect that community forestry is especially instrumental. Local villagers openly embrace the program because it offers a tremendously attractive, if not also the only, opportunity to acquire greater access to, and responsibility for, local community forests. In other words, as local communities vie for increased access to local forests, they embrace the institutional and technical requirements necessary for recognition as a ‘user group’ and the hand-over of management responsibility, and in so doing contribute to the expansion of the ‘governmental’ apparatus .

### **Community Forestry and Local Politics**

That development, and community forestry, now place a premium on political considerations belies the tremendous ambivalence development has had with politics. As Ferguson (1990: 226) notes in his study of development in Lesotho, there is

a fundamental contradiction in the role ‘development agencies’ are intended to play. On the one hand, they are supposed to bring about ‘social change,’ sometimes of a dramatic and far-reaching sort. At the same time, they are not supposed to ‘get involved in politics’ – and in fact have a strong de-politicizing function. But any real effort at ‘social change’ cannot help but have powerful political implications, which a ‘development project’ is constitutionally unfit to deal with. To do what it is set up to do (bring about socio-economic transformations), a ‘development’ project must attempt what it is set up not to be able to do (involve itself in political struggles).

Clearly, development is embedded within “specific experiences and relations of power and cannot be separated from the political and social setting” (Abrahamsen 2000: 139)

within which it has emerged, is transformed, reconfigured, or contested, and is put into practice. And yet it is extremely common to encounter claims of the apolitical nature of community forestry. This “depoliticization” of community forestry’s policies and practices not only attempts to displace existing political realities but also has the effect of portraying even the most sensitive political operations, for example fostering democracy or greater participation, as somehow neutral or reducible to a technical problem – as has been the case with poverty, disempowerment, or deforestation. As Gilmour and Fisher (1991: 75) note:

All project interventions may have effects on the local power structure. Community forestry is concerned with control of resources, i.e., it is a political issue. Any move to transfer control of resources is likely to lead to attempts by some individuals to manipulate a situation to their own advantage. This often leads to people with wealth and power gaining disproportionate benefits, and using a changing situation to entrench their own positions.

This is precisely the situation I encountered in Manohar, where the local political and economic elite have managed to gain disproportionately through community forestry.

In examining community forestry as put into practice ‘on the ground,’ that is, within a local village setting, I also offer another dimension to the political implications of community forestry. Community forestry claims to provide a ‘depoliticized’ solution to the problems encountered with previous *Panchayat* Forest and *Panchayat* Protected Forest legislation: the adherence to political-spatial boundaries and the vesting of management control in the hands of local political representatives. Additionally, community forestry policy claims to be the basis for overcoming a number of social imbalances within communities, the micro-politics of social difference. Instead, it appears that villagers’ involvement in community forestry, especially in terms of

membership on committees, forest use, and management of forests, differs in terms of caste, gender, wealth, and educational differences among villagers. Thus there appears to be very little evidence to suggest that community forestry has provided a basis for changing local forms of inequality. Instead, community forestry's claims to promote democratization, participation, and empowerment within communities is being attempted without directly addressing the heterogeneous character of village life, of the various divisions between men and women, rich and poor, along caste and ethnic lines, or of power and micro-politics. Although aspects of social difference may be 'recognized' in community forestry policy and legislation it has yet to fully operationalize this recognition. As the case in Manohar (and other villages in Nepal) reveals, there remains a significant disparity between those individuals who are dependent on forests, and those who are in positions of authority vis-à-vis forest management.

Additionally, it appears that community forestry might also be providing a venue with which local elites could gain political power and experience with which they could then use in acquiring political positions. While there is a very strong connection between political office holders and membership on FUG committees, I found the pattern to be the inverse of what I had initially supposed; it was politicians who were branching out to become members of FUG committees. I also found that the higher the political office, the higher the position on the FUG committee. But the direction of this relationship is very likely to be different in different settings, and is liable to change over time. Even in Manohar, several of the younger members of the FUG and other village development committees expressed an interest in being involved in politics in the future, and felt that membership in one or more of these committees would serve as a useful way in which to

gain the necessary experience and political/social capital needed to realize their ambitions. This will surely bode well for promoting democracy from the grass-roots upwards, and continue to maintain the political character of community forestry, but will also likely continue to temper the aim of bolstering wide-spread empowerment. Surely, this is an area of research that requires much further attention.

Another of the implications arising as a result of the transfer of responsibility for the management of community forests is that it is providing a basis for a vast reduction in social services provided by the state. This situation has the potential for both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, communities (or at least those particular individuals in positions to decide on which local development projects to pursue) are given greater freedom to address their own needs and development priorities. On the other hand, ‘communities’ are now charged with a double burden; not only are communities given the responsibility of managing local forests in a sustainable manner but also with using the financial gains from the sale of products for local community development projects. As Schroeder (1999:) remarks “‘Community-based’ management... has in many circumstances simply acted as a convenient mechanism for carrying out budget cuts under structural adjustment policies... while developers have been eager to decentralize costs, they have been simultaneously loathe to give up control.” And it is this gutting of social services in the interest of economic efficiency that is being portrayed as ‘decentralization’ and/or local ‘community development’.

And finally, this study has attempted to argue that the ultimate success of Nepal’s community forestry program will be tempered unless greater attention is given to the differences that inhere in communities (situated on the ground). Images of community

that continue to genericize, to disregard social diversity, and that only juxtapose the community vis-à-vis the state, cannot, as Agrawal has argued, “contribute to any usable notion of community-based conservation” (1997: 2). What is needed are analyses of community-based resource management programs and development that concentrate far more closely on institutions and processes not only within communities but at larger levels that include the state and other transnational actors that have come to shape such programs. But such analyses, as I have attempted here, also require closer attention to the basic concepts upon which community forestry and development are based. Only when we combine such considerations, integrating such multiple sites and scales of analysis, and questioning our often taken-for-granted assumptions and concepts, that we can hope to contribute a much more thorough understanding of the consequences of such programs. While I do not end with recommendations of how to alleviate some of the problems and contradictions I have revealed in this study, it is my hope that this study adds to the debates aimed at improving community forestry and its outcomes.

*All stories are haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been.*  
Salman Rushdie, *Shame*.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **GENERAL CONTENTS OF FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS**

#### **Part One: Introduction**

- CFUG name, address
- List of all member households in the CFUG, and address
- Historical background of forest
- Socio-economic condition
- Operational Plan preparation procedure and amendment process

#### **Part Two: Description of the Forest**

- Forest condition and management objectives, social and technical description,

#### **Part Three: Block/sub block division**

- Divided by users on the basis of condition and management objective,

#### **Part Four: Forest inventory and data analysis**

- Explanation of forest inventory methodology and sampling design and intensity,
- Area-wise growing stock,
- Regeneration condition,

#### **Part Five: Forest management**

- Description of forest protection, silvicultural operation, harvesting and utilization,
- NTFP and bio-diversity,
- Plan for forest products useful for users,
- Harvesting plan,
- Planning for forest product collection, harvesting and distribution considering gender and equity,
- Planning for agro-forestry (if insufficient production from forest),
- Planning for selling (in case of surplus production)

#### **Part Six: CFUG fund mobilization**

- Planned for forest and community development activities,

#### **Part Seven: Provision of fine and other punishment**

- Description of conditions for fine and punishment,

#### **Part Eight: Monitoring and evaluation**

- Considered as an indispensable activity,

Part Nine: Specific directives of DoF

- Mentioned if any,

Part Ten: Miscellaneous

- Provision for praise and rewards,
- Bank account handling,
- List of prohibited activities in community forests, etc.

Part Eleven: Annexes

- Forest boundary map,
- Forest boundary survey field book,
- Forest block/sub block division map with inventory sample plots,
- Map of important forest products explaining growing stocks, assumed increment rate, harvesting plan, etc.

*(Source: Annex 17 of NSCFP Annual Report 1997/98)*